

Towards a Method for Reconciling Felt and Unfelt Needs

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The paradigm shift to more participatory approaches and the extensive use of PRA in development programs has re-emphasised the importance of needs. They are increasingly seen, as the magic key to successful change and represent the focus of a large number of development programs. However, judging by the large variety of approaches, there seems to exist a lot of confusion among many practitioners concerning the relevancy of the various types of needs and particularly the felt and unfelt needs and how to cope with these.

Major Points to be Shared

The following major points will be shared:

- A classification of needs according to their intra-personal and environment location.
- The influence relationship between intra-personal basic needs and environment located primary, secondary and specific objectives
- Limitations of felt needs for the identification of development of program priorities
- The necessity for finding a compromise between felt and unfelt needs for identifying the development priority
- Demonstration of the method

The Method

The method for testing and/or demonstrating the compatibility is by systematically conceptualising and pursuing the results or consequences of every felt and unfelt need or problem. It is based on the phenomenon that there are different levels of needs and objectives and that these are interdependent or that an influence relationship exists between them. In fact, it is the interdependency, which governs the potential compatibility. Normally the intra-personal and person-located need is the most basic need, and is achieved through environment-located goals and objectives (primary objectives). These, in turn, become manifested in or can be realized through more specific objectives (secondary objectives), etc.

Conclusions

The conceptualisation diagram clearly shows whether needs are compatible or not and whether consensus can be reached regarding the main problem and thus point of departure of a program. The usefulness of the technique lies in the phenomenon that a systematic seeking of the results of problems or needs, i.e., from the specific problems of objectives to the secondary and primary levels, tends to resulting the needs or problems becoming more general in nature but less in numbers. This increases the likelihood of achieving consensus, which is vital if a program is to be widely accepted and supported and if it is to be successful.

Educational or Extension Importance

Leads to a new understanding and categorization of different types of needs.

Allows for more consensus regarding the major need, problem or objective within a community and consequently enhances participation and the likelihood of success.