Tool: Institutional Analysis

A tool to

**Aim of the tool**
To analyse the institutions that have a bearing on the core issue of your intervention

**When to use it?**
This tool is particularly useful at the start of the intervention and when the issue of strategies for change is raised

**What is an Institutional Analysis?**

In this tool the term ‘institutions’ does not mean ‘organisations’, see Box 1. Institutions refer to cultural values, legal frameworks, market mechanisms and political processes: the ‘rules of the game’ (Brouwer et al 2012). The tool will therefore help you to think critically about how different aspects of institutions influence your intervention. It is important to note that there are no other ‘widely accepted’ tools for analysing institutions despite the fact that the concept of institution is so important to social change-focused development.

**Institutions** involve rules, organisations and social norms that facilitate human and organisational action. Institutions are therefore important to the attainment of efficient, sustainable and equitable development outcomes (through, e.g., the creation of trust and confidence in societal systems such as the financial system, etc.). Formal institutions (e.g., the laws governing the workforce) are just as important as informal institutions (e.g., traditional system of labour in some societies).

**Organisations** are structures that have been either created to take advantage of the opportunities for action provided by existing institutions, or created to implement new institutions such as laws and regulations.

**Box 1: Differences between institutions and organisation**

![Figure 1: A simple framework for asking critical questions about different types of institutions (Woodhill, 2008)](image)

Figure 1 shows a simple framework for asking critical questions about different types of institutions (based on action, association, meaning and association), and about how they interact and often reinforce each other. Institutions can be best viewed in terms of:

- giving **meaning** to our lives and the social and natural world we inhabit.
- the **associations** we make to work together to achieve social, economic and political objectives.
- the basis for **control** over what individuals and organisations should or can do.

**reoccurring action** carried out by individuals or organisations in social, economic and political life.
Why develop an Institutional Analysis?

Institutional Analysis - Step by step

Step 1:
Identify the relevant institutions that have a bearing on the core issue of your intervention (refer to the matrix in Figure 1).

- Write the core issue in the middle of the flip chart.
- Brainstorm to find out the key institutions influencing (positively or negatively) the core issue—values, norms, laws, policies; organisations, groups, structures, networks, services, citizens demands, actions, etc.
- Group the institutions identified under the headings meaning, control, association, action (see examples below).

Examples of questions that you can use to help brainstorm on ‘meaning’:
- What are the general beliefs in the government and society about the emerging issue?
- What are the norms and values in the community and the society at large?
- What are the main theories, conceptual frameworks and bodies of knowledge being used to set policies and design interventions?
- How much alignment or contradiction is there between the different theories and between theory, cultural values and practices?

Examples of questions that you can use to help you brainstorm on ‘association’:
- Which organised actors are important to the emerging issue (government agencies, donors, NGOs, CBOs etc.)?
- What contractual, formal or informal relationships exist among these different organizations?

Examples of questions to help brainstorm on ‘control’:
- What is the national policy on the emerging issue? How is the emerging issue ‘being dealt with in relation to other national strategies and policies (e.g., Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs))?
- What are the specific mandates of the different organizations?
- What are the rules and regulations governing the institutions?
- What are the informal rules governing established practices?
- What are the reasons behind these informal systems?

Examples of questions to help brainstorm on ‘action’:
- As a result of the above, what services are actually operating?
- Who is using them and what are the patterns of behavior?
- How significant is the informal sector and how would you characterize its behavior?
- How do staff of service providers behave towards their clients?
- What type of corrupt behavior exists in the sector? What is the level?

Step 2:
Reflect on: What are the implications for your intervention? Which positive institutions do you need to re-enforce and build on? Which institution should you try to change? – indicate them on the analysis sheet.

Examples
The drawings show the main institutions impacting on the interventions

Learn more

- CDI course material (internal documents)