Tool Name: Institutional Perception Mapping	
What is it?	This tool is a visual method of identifying and representing perceptions of key institutions (formal and informal) and individuals inside and outside a community and their relationships and importance to different social groups.
What can it be used for?	• understanding the interests and relationships of different social groups living in a community • understanding the key factors affecting relationships with other groups • understanding how different community members perceive institutions both within the community (in terms of decision making, accessibility, and services) and outside the community (in terms of participation, accessibility, and services) • identifying potential entry points for strengthening or improving relationships between key social actors
What does it tell you?	• the interests, participation, and relationships of different social groups living in a community in local organizations/institutions • the perceived importance, accessibility, and impact of different institutions to local people of different social groups • the organizations in a community and how they relate both to each other and to external agencies involved in the delivery of services and the administration of programs • the impact of potential policy change or implementation on social and institutional relationships
Complementary tools	Social mapping, mobility mapping, Venn diagramming
Key elements	This participatory data generating process uses local perceptions of key institutions.
Requirements	
Data/information	This tool generates data and information; so the only prior information required is for sampling analysts.
Time	30 to 60 minutes (maximum 90 minutes)
Skills	Good participatory facilitation skills and knowledge
Supporting software	No software needed
Financial cost	This tool will cost $30,000 to $100,000 when conducted as part of a participatory study, depending on the number of communities sampled and the geographical scope of the study.
Limitations	Political or social relationships, which might not be obvious to an outsider, might influence group consensus.
References and applications	Brocklesbury, M. A. 2002. *Chars Livelihoods Programme, Diversity and Livelihoods Assessment. Fieldwork Guide.* “Annex One: Outline of Methods.” Swansea, Centre for Development Studies.

Institutional Perception Mapping: Procedures and Examples

Time, Materials, and Skills Needed

One-half to one hour should be allowed to produce and analyze an institutional perception map and to ensure that a full discussion occurs with local analysts. The time required will depend on the complexity of the relationships being identified and described, but facilitators should try not to exceed 90 minutes.

The materials required include oval or circle-shaped cards of different sizes and colors (to represent each different interest or social group), large sheets of paper, and markers in different colors. (The ground can also be used for the cards; stones will be needed to keep the cards in place). Notebooks/paper and pens are needed to make a copy of the diagram and also for the note-taker to record the discussion during the diagram development.

The discussion group will include a facilitator, observer/note-taker and selected local analysts. The facilitator and observer/note-taker should be experienced in the principles behind the use of participatory tools and methods in addition to their practical use.

Possible Approach

The following approach is a general example that can be adapted to suit the local context, views of local analysts, and the research objectives.

Step 1: Select Local Analysts. Identify the groups of people to talk to about their perceptions of their local institutions. These decisions will be based on the objectives and depth of information required for the research. At a basic level, it might be necessary to have separate groups by gender because women and men might perceive the importance and relevance of institutions in different ways. It might also be appropriate to break the population down into further categories (such as ethnicity, well-being, or caste). Groups of five to twelve local analysts should reflect any relevant and important social divisions.

Step 2: Provide Introductions and Explanations. When working with each group, the facilitator and observer/note-taker should begin by introducing themselves and explaining carefully and clearly the objectives of the discussion. Check that the local analysts understand and feel comfortable with what will be discussed.

Step 3: Produce an Institutional Perception Map. Ask the local analysts to identify "actors" with whom they interact (in their economic, social or political activity). Explain that these actors could be physically present in the area or could be associated directly or indirectly (such as politicians) and could be individuals, groups, or organizations.

If an identified actor is a group or an organization, ask the analysts to break the group into individual interest groups. For example, a government department could be broken down into local level representatives, district head, and national head; a "village" might be broken down into landowners, petty traders, village council members, and so on. The extent of knowledge about, or importance of, such subgroups can then be explored.

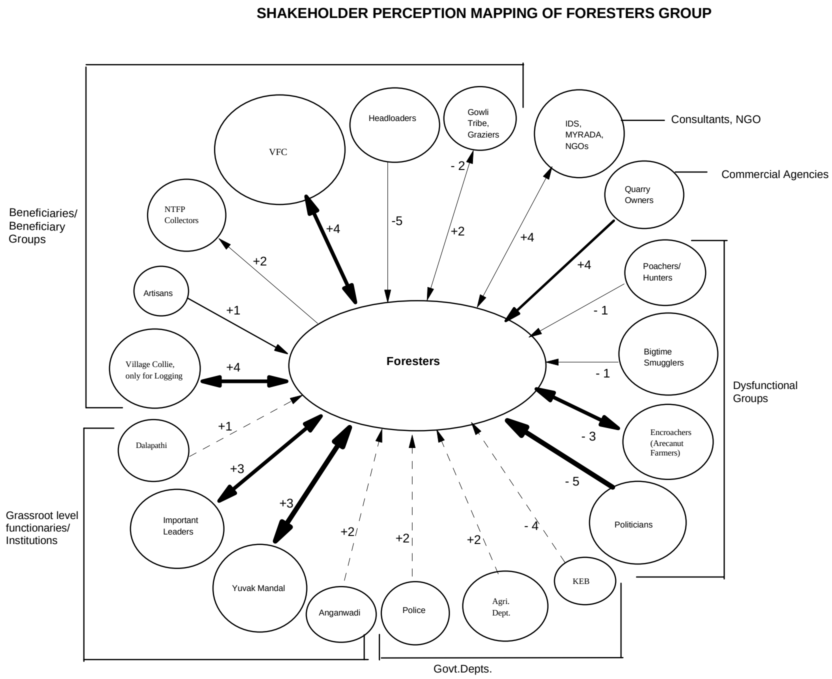
Ask the analysts to discuss and assess the importance of each actor or group to them. Discussions about what is meant by “importance” can be instructive. It might include influence or power, number of people involved, or simply a reflection of the group’s level of understanding, but the importance will inevitably be tied up with the nature of the relationship between the groups.

Ask the analysts to use different sizes of cards to represent the relative degree of importance (low, medium, or high, with the smallest card representing low, and the largest card representing high) and to arrange these cards around a central card (that represents the analysts themselves) on a large piece of paper or on the ground.

One dimension of the institutional perception map is the accessibility felt by the group of local analysts to the other actors (that is, the accessibility of the institutional resources of the group in question, or the degree to which the group can be accessed in terms of consultation or influence). Ask the analysts to place each card a distance from the center that reflects this accessibility. For example, politicians or big businesses might be inaccessible, and either important or not very important.

Another dimension of the institutional map is the relationship between the central card (which represents the local analysts in discussion) and the other cards. Ask the analysts to represent the nature of this relationship by using different types of lines, which illustrate the strength and direction of each relationship. For example, a dashed line (------) for a weak relationship; single line (—) for a medium relationship, and a thick single line (➔) for a strong relationship. Ask the analysts to indicate the positive or negative nature of the relationship by using an arrow (either one way or two ways) to indicate who influences whom. Figure 1 shows an example of an institutional perception map.

Figure 1. Example of an Institutional Perception Map

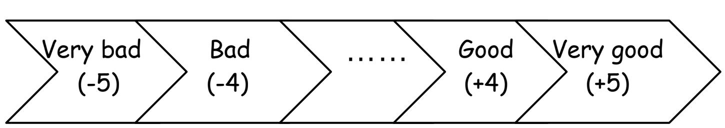


Source: Brocklesby 2002.

Step 4: Analyze an Institutional Perception Map. Many aspects of the relationships shown on the map can be explored. These are not easy to quantify, or to illustrate graphically, beyond the size and distance of the cards and the types of lines connecting them. Relationships can be based on a number of factors, including power and influence, flows of money or information, social or cultural bonds, or constraints, legal or institutional mandate, fear, mutually beneficial collaboration, and altruism.

Ask the local analysts to explore and explain the basis of each relationship (such as the flows of money between an NGO and a self-help credit group, or coercion through the denial of access of the landless to collection of grass for fodder) and discuss how these relationships can be changed or improved. Explore whether the arrows imply control of one group over another (such as a landlord over a sharecropper) and the nature of the control. Ask the analysts about the impact a potential policy change or implementation might have on these relationships, whether positive or negative. Explore the possible opportunities and constraints to change.

Relative scoring methods can also be used to assess relationships. For example, ask the analysts to score the relationships as:



This scoring enables comparisons over time and assessments of relative change. In this way, the map can be used at a later stage as a monitoring tool and to contribute to the assessment of impacts of policy changes or implementation. However, a disadvantage of using the scoring method is that attributing scores can cause some difficulty and might actually detract from the discussions based on a qualitative understanding of relationships. This can be overcome by using a standard set of descriptor words selected by the local analysts to describe their relationships, which can then have a score attached to them by the analysts (alternatively, sad/happy face symbols could also be used). Record the reasons the local analysts describe a particular relationship as being good or bad.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that a partial or even inaccurate view might be expressed in the map and analysis. There might be, for example, hidden power relationships that some would prefer not to reveal. This problem could be addressed by comparing a range of maps and analysis by different social groups and by looking for inconsistencies or contradictions. Knowledge of the composition of groups of local analysts (such as membership of organizations, position within a community, or occupation) would be useful at this stage.

If there are several different groups of analysts, ask each group to present its map to the others for their reactions and comments. Are there any serious disagreements? If so, note these and where a consensus is or is not reached. However, while this exercise could highlight conflicts and frictions in the community between different organizations or with outside organizations and could be useful during planning processes as well as for any policy change and implementation, care should be taken when facilitating discussions about potentially sensitive issues to ensure that conflicts or disagreements are not inflamed further.

Step 5: Conclude the Activity. Check again that the local analysts know how the information will be used. Ask the analysts to reflect on the advantages, disadvantages, and the analytical potential of the tool. Thank the local analysts for their time and effort.

Points to Remember

Good facilitation skills are key. The approach outlined above is a general guide; be flexible and adapt the tool and approach to local contexts and needs.