

What makes information useful?

Exploring factors which make a piece of information useful or meaningful for a particular individual or context.

WHY?

Information cannot solve the problems of poverty unless it is accompanied by the skills, confidence and knowledge to seek and use it. Furthermore, the meaning and value of any piece of information varies depending on the context in which it is received, the source, format, language etc. People will attach value to particular sources, although these may not actually be as trustworthy as they are perceived to be. It is important for participants to be aware of the factors affecting how useful a piece of information can be to them, in order to develop capacity to source and analyse information that is of potential use to them.

WHEN?

This is an important step to undertake after an initial exploration of the value of information (see separate sheet).

HOW?

The box (right) shows some of the types of factors affecting the value and accessibility of any piece of information. These can be explored through general facilitated discussion and visual graphics, some examples of which are covered here, although more could be developed to fit the local context and issues.

Generating discussion

Role plays or games can be used to illustrate the problems of misinformation/propaganda and hidden agendas. To evaluate the differential impact that different sources, formats or languages might have, participants could be asked to consider and discuss the impact of the same piece of information received in different formats (taped radio item, written, word of mouth etc).

BOX 1 – HOW MEANINGFUL?

Factors affecting the usefulness of information may include any or some of the following:

- **The source:** the same piece of information will have a different impact depending on where it comes from;
- **The format/ medium:** the same piece of information may have more credibility if written than spoken, or vice versa;
- **Relevance:** people will not use information that is not relevant to them, although the relevance can change from day to day;
- **Capacity:** People need to be able to find and decipher the information in order for it to have meaning and value to them. This may mean language skills, literacy or computer literacy, or simply mean having the necessary equipment, such as a video or radio;
- **Confidence:** Perhaps most importantly, a piece of information will only be useful if the recipient has the confidence to demand it and use it. This requires someone to have confidence in his or her own knowledge.

Outcome of discussions in Burundi Reflect ICT training

When is a piece of information valuable?

- When it reinforces prior knowledge
- When it can influence behaviour change
- When it allows you to get what you want
- When it creates inner blossoming
- When it is not divisive
- When it orients someone in their path/ life
- When it relates to work opportunity
- When it can protect you from danger
- When it can serve to re-establish security
- When it allows for social cohesion
- When it gives awareness of the reality overseas

What makes it most useful?

- When it can be a base for development
- When it allows for social cohesion
- When it gives awareness of the reality overseas
- When it is timely
- When it is understandable
- When it is directed at the right people
- When it is given to someone who can use it well.
- When it is read without reductions or adjustments
- When the receiver is sure it is true
- When it is from a trusted and known source
- When it is non-subversive and collective

