

# Research and analysis

**Description** This section looks at the type of information required to gain a deeper understanding of the issues identified in SECTION C1 and before undertaking any advocacy work. Much of the information will be needed before undertaking any sort of development work, but some of it is more specific to advocacy, such as understanding the political context. The tools given here are mainly those that can be used in a workshop setting or desk-based research. For tools for field research, it is useful to obtain a PRA or PLA manual.

**Learning objectives** By the end of the section, participants will be able to:

- choose appropriate methods to gather the necessary information to understand the issues they have identified
- know how to assess information for its usefulness
- understand the wider political and social context
- analyse root causes of poverty.

**Links** This section builds on SECTION C0 (The advocacy cycle) and SECTION C1 (Issue identification). It links with SECTION A1 (Poverty and development), SECTION A3 (Why advocacy?), SECTION A4 (Good practice in advocacy) and SECTION C3.4 (Stakeholder mapping and analysis).

**Overview** All advocacy work needs to be based on accurate, reliable and sufficient information. As with other types of development work, good information is important for advocacy in order to:

- understand the context in which you work, including causes and effects of the particular issue you are trying to address, to ensure that any response takes into account all factors and is the most appropriate and effective for given situation
- understand how the context is changing so any response will be able to address potential future needs or prevent problems from arising
- justify any particular course of action to your organisation, beneficiaries, others you are working with and funders
- learn from past successes and mistakes
- provide good evidence for your argument
- understand what others are doing, in order to avoid duplication and to collaborate if appropriate.

We have split the research into three broad categories:

- 2.1 Understanding the wider context and forces operating on society, mainly at country level (TOOLS 6–8).
- 2.2 Understanding the root causes of the issue in the local context (TOOLS 9–10).
- 2.3 Desk-based research (TOOLS 11–12).

Note of caution

It is tempting to spend all of your time researching and collecting information about your country or area and then not having time to actually take action. It is important to get a balance between having enough information to enable you to act upon it and gathering too much so that you will never act!

## 2.1 Understanding the wider context



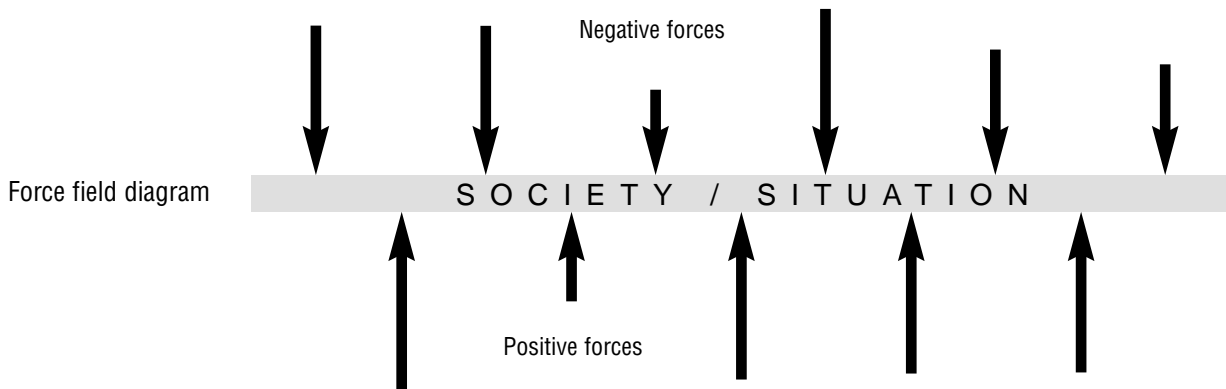
### TOOL 6 **Force field analysis**



**Aim** To help participants recognise the different forces acting in society, either for good or bad, and to consider ways to make the most of the good forces and minimise the negative ones.

This tool compares the strengths of the different forces, trends or influences as they are operating in society, such as society becoming more democratic or an area becoming more prone to environmental disasters. It is helpful to think of the forces as political, economic, social, technical and environmental. The tool enables understanding of the factors that are hindering or supporting your development work, and what you will need to concentrate your advocacy work on in order to bring about change.

**Method** Choose a particular society (such as a country) or a specific situation (such as girls not attending school). Brainstorm the forces that are acting on the society or situation. Draw and label up to ten arrows for each of the negative and positive forces. The positive forces point up, the negative ones point down. The length of the arrows shows the strength of the forces – the longer the arrow, the stronger the force as in the diagram below. This is primarily an exercise of ranking, and of discussion between everyone involved to come to some form of agreement about the strongest positive and negative forces. Some forces affect different people in different ways. For example, richer people are more likely to be able to cope with an increase in food prices. It is best to look at the effects of the forces on the poorest members of society.



It can be useful to transfer the ranking of the forces to a table. Once in the table you can decide which forces are likely to increase over time and continue for ten or twenty years. These are a priority to focus on. You can also decide which forces are likely to decrease and will become less important in five years time. You should give these lower priority.

Examples of potential forces

Positive forces	Negative forces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ church is active in grassroots development work and speaking out for justice</li> <li>■ diverse economy with strong local business development</li> <li>■ on track to receive debt relief</li> <li>■ freedom of speech for all religious and ethnic groups</li> <li>■ all local children going to primary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ frequent flooding in some areas</li> <li>■ increasing incidence of AIDS and other diseases</li> <li>■ high levels of unemployment</li> <li>■ internal conflict or conflict with neighbouring countries</li> <li>■ main road in area becoming impassable in the rainy season</li> </ul>

Consider which positive forces you can strengthen. This might involve helping an open government system to develop policies that are more favourable towards poor people.

Then consider which negative forces you can reduce. This might involve tackling the increasing incidence of AIDS through education work, lobbying for cheaper medicinal drugs or encouraging the church to look after AIDS orphans.



TOOL 7

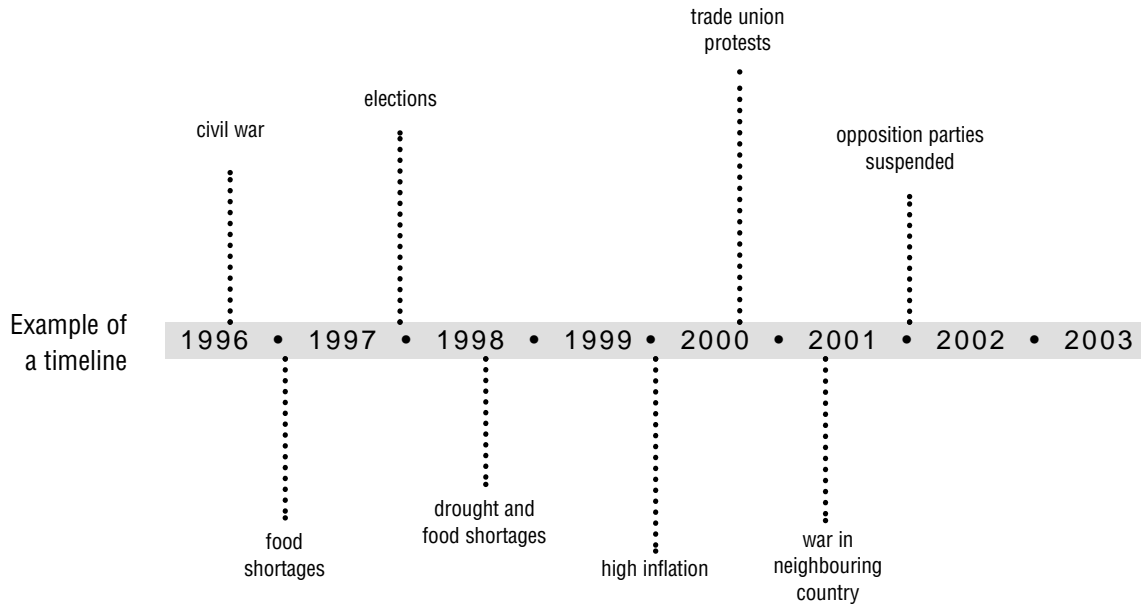
**Drawing a timeline of key events**



**Aim**

To understand the key events in recent history which influence the country or local area, in order to determine advocacy priorities.

This tool serves a similar purpose to the force field analysis, but roots the understanding in a historical context.



**Method** Draw a timeline covering a certain number of years and agree together which have been the key events that have influenced the country or area. Some of the events will be obvious, but other events may be less obvious. Events could include food price increases, or a high profile trial or legal case.

- Key points**
- Do not write everything down as this will take too much time and clutter the diagram. Only write the main events.
  - This process, if done in a group, can be useful in clarifying different interpretations of events and to help people come to a common view of history and process of events.
  - It can help predict what is likely to happen in the future which can help you to determine advocacy priorities.
  - It is useful to keep this as a reference document that you add further information to as key events unfold.
  - The timeline can also include events that will happen in the future, such as elections and meetings. This can help you plan for suitable advocacy interventions.



TOOL 8

**Contextual analysis**



**Aim** To help participants understand the wider situation in their country in more depth.

This analysis tool is similar to the force field analysis but goes into much greater depth and deals with facts as well as trends. For each element it considers:

- **FACTS** What are the big issues affecting the poor?
- **FUTURE** How do you think each of these issues will change in 5 or 10 years time?
- **IMPLICATIONS** What are the implications for your area and the work you are doing?

Possible elements to cover and suggested questions to ask are offered below. You may want to choose the elements that are most relevant for you:

**ECONOMIC SITUATION** What is the level of poverty? What is the cost of basic commodities? Who is excluded from economic activity? What is the level of national debt? Who has economic power?

**BASIC NEEDS** What percentage of the population has access to basic services such as health, water, education and housing?

**SPIRITUAL** Which different religions are practised? Is there conflict or co-operation between religious groups?

**SOCIAL** How common are single parent or child-headed households? Who has power in the family? What is the rate of family breakdown? What is the status of women in society? Who are the most vulnerable in society? How are they treated?

**ETHNICITY** What are the main ethnic groups? How do they relate to each other?

**HEALTH** What is the prevalence of AIDS? What is the rate of infant/maternal mortality?

**EDUCATION** What percentage of people go to primary and secondary school? Why do people not go to school? What level of education do girls reach? What is the economic and social status of teachers?

**EMPLOYMENT** What are the main types of employment? What is the level of unemployment? Who owns and controls the means of production? Do trade unions exist, and are they recognised by the government?

**ENVIRONMENT** What percentage of the population has access to good sanitation and clean water supplies? What are the main environmental threats? What protection has been ensured against these? How much land is suitable for agriculture? How many people live in a state of food insecurity?

**POLITICAL** Who has power in society? Who makes the decisions? What type of political system is there? Are elections free and fair? Are any Christians involved in politics? What concern is there for the poor? What participation in politics is there by the poor?

**SECURITY / PEACE** Can the police be trusted? What mechanisms are there for peace? Who is involved? How is the church involved? What have the effects of war been?

**URBAN / RURAL ISSUES** What are the differing situations of rural and urban population? What is the level of migration? Do slums exist, and what are the conditions like there?

**CIVIL RIGHTS** Is there an independent and unbiased legal system? Is there freedom of movement, religion and expression? Is there a free media, outside of the control of the government?

**GOVERNMENT POLICIES** How do government policies and laws make any of the situations above better or worse? What is the effect of policies of overseas governments or international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?

## 2.2 Understanding the root causes in your specific context



TOOL 9

### Economic and political power triangles

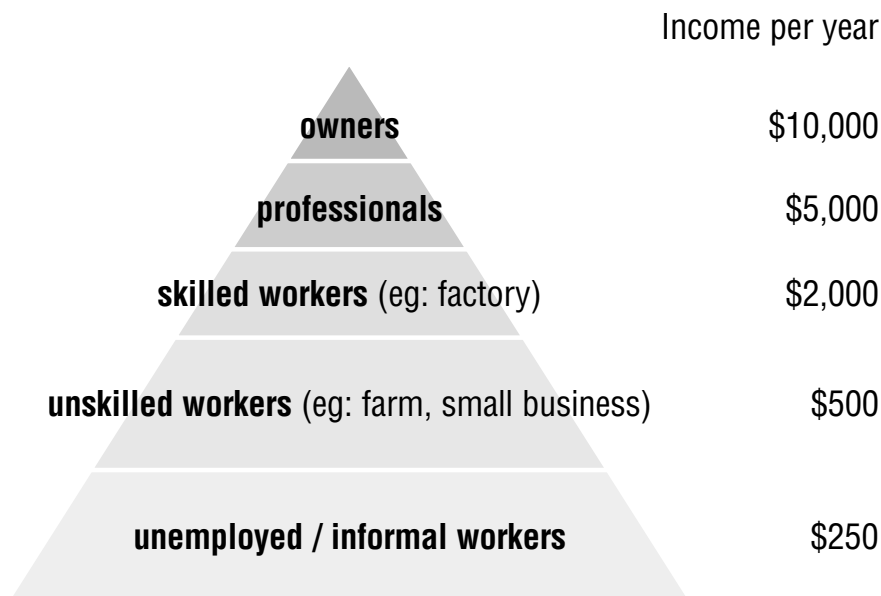


**Aim**

To understand how political and economic power structures contribute towards local problems.

In SECTION A5, we outlined an exercise for mapping power. Here we show another way of representing forms of power – mainly economic and political – as triangles of hierarchy. This demonstrates who has the power and on what this power is based. It is useful in understanding how specific expressions of power affect specific local problems and can therefore provide a clear focus for advocacy work. An example of a triangle for economic power is shown below.

Example of a hierarchy triangle for different occupations



**Key points**

- The area of each layer of the triangle represents the number of people in each category.
- There are fewer people in each segment as you work your way up towards the top of the triangle, because power is usually concentrated in the hands of a few.
- The economic and political power of those at the top is usually based on the support (willing or otherwise) of the people in the layers below.

- If you draw different triangles for political and economic power, it is possible to see the similarities between the groups of people who have political power and the groups who have economic power, helping to show how they reinforce each other.

Analysis

This tool can help people see how the operation of economic and political power contributes towards the poverty in their specific context. Some questions to help people analyse the situation further could include:

- Who makes the economic or political decisions?
- Who is included and who is excluded?
- How is power maintained?
- In whose interest are decisions made?
- Who owns the land and means of production?
- How do people move from one layer of the pyramid to another? Does this often happen? Which layers do people usually move between?
- Can people hold those in the layers above them accountable for their actions?
- What cultural factors contribute towards the maintenance of these power structures?
- What needs to change so that economic resources and decision-making are more fairly distributed?

The tool can also be extended to show that people within each layer are not the same and that there will be power dynamics between them, according to gender, age, role etc.



TOOL 10

**The ‘why?’ exercise and problem tree**



**Aim**

To get to the root of the problem in order to address the problem in the most appropriate way.

The ‘why?’ exercise is a method that keeps asking ‘why?’ until it gets to the root of the problem. It makes the connection between the wider context (TOOLS 6–8) and specific issues. There are three steps for this tool.

**STEP 1**  
**The ‘why?’ exercise**

State a common problem that people have identified as something to address. Keep asking ‘but why?’ until the group can go no further with their explanations of the causes behind it.

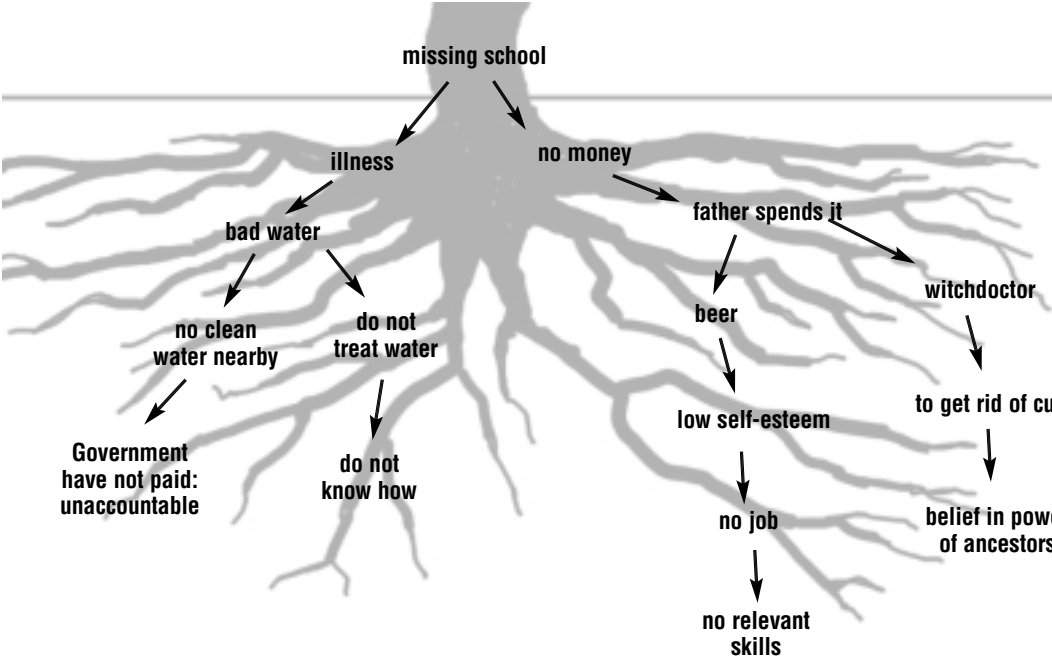
Finding the root causes of the problem

The children are not going to school *But why?*  
 They keep falling ill. *But why?*  
 They drink bad water. *But why?*  
 The well is too far away to go each day. *But why?*  
 The government said 12 months ago it would build a well closer but has done nothing. *But why?*  
 The local government official has not released the funds that have been set aside. *But why?*  
 His department will benefit from the interest while he keeps the money and there is no-one to keep him accountable. *But why?*  
 Community groups are not represented in the local political process.  
 ...etc

**STEP 2**  
**The problem tree**

At each 'but why?' there are a variety of answers that can be given and if the 'why?' exercise is repeated for the same problem a number of times, you will be able to identify many of the roots of the problem. A simple example is given below, although problem trees can sometimes become much larger!

Example of root causes in a problem tree



The challenge is to decide which of the many causes you can address and the type of intervention to take. These can then be turned into objectives for your work (see SECTION C3.2). A development project intervention might be providing a water supply for a school. An advocacy intervention might be to hold the local government to account for its use of finances. Another intervention might be spiritual transformation such as teaching on witchcraft.

**Key points**

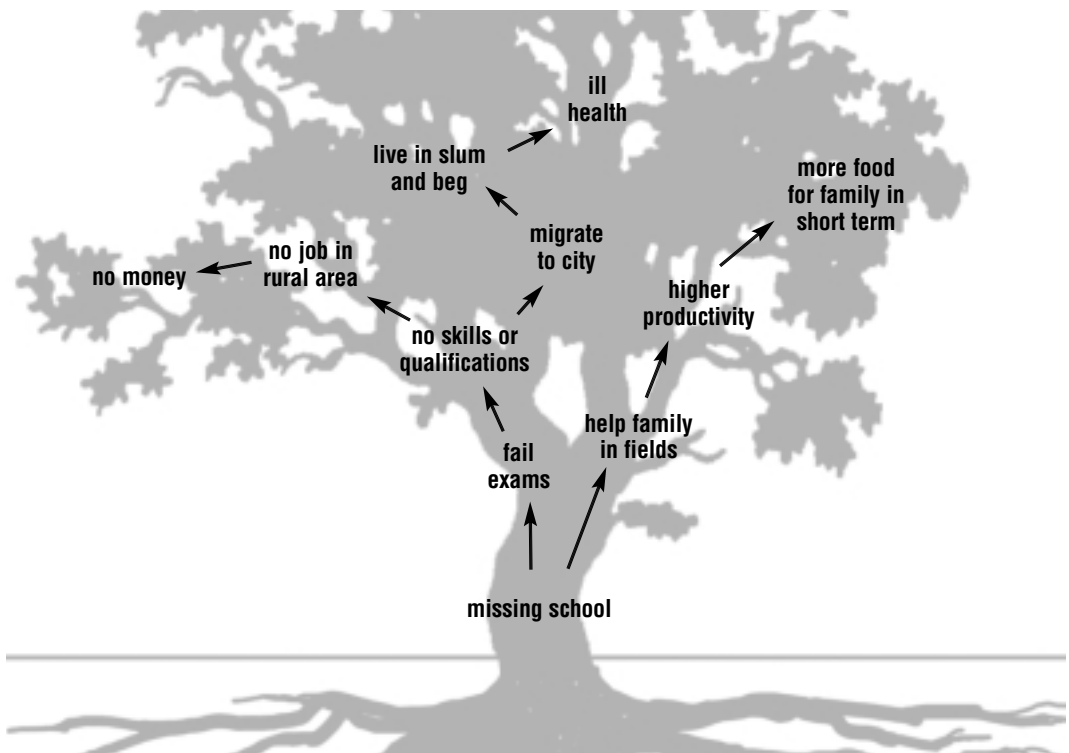
- Advocacy, development project work and spiritual transformation can all work together to tackle the same problem.
- Interventions can happen at any point in the diagram – wherever you think you have the greatest chance of success.
- You will not be able to tackle all of the problems at once, and it is unlikely that you will be able to get right to the root causes at the start. However, you can make a difference wherever you start.

**STEP 3**  
**Adding the**  
**'effects' of the**  
**problem to the**  
**problem tree**

The problem tree can be extended to include the effects of the problem, which become the branches growing out of the tree. This highlights areas for intervention to lessen the effects of the problem. This addresses the immediate needs until a lasting solution can be found. In the example given below, this might include:

- treating illness
- giving food or money to the person who is unemployed
- giving money to the person who lives in the slums and begs.

Example of effects in a problem tree



The whole exercise of the problem tree (causes and effects) is best done on a long piece of paper on the wall – so that people can see the all the causes and effects and possible interventions at the same time. The paper can be written on directly or people can stick post-it notes onto it and move them around as necessary.

## 2.3 Desk-based research



### TOOL 11

### Sources and types of information



#### Aim

To see what sources of and types of information are available, and how the information might be viewed by advocacy targets.

#### Information sources

- Information is needed that will provide both facts and analysis about the situation.
- The best approach is to find a few sources that you trust and find easy to use.
- At the start it may take time to gather all the information you need, but after you have the basic information, keeping up to date with the latest developments is likely to become easier as you become more familiar with the issue and with the information sources.
- In some cases you may already have the information you need to start advocacy work.

When approaching these sources to try and collect information, you will make the most of your effort if you:

- are clear about what you want
- do an initial scan for information available and then go back later to do the detailed research
- go to the information officer or librarian for advice about how to find and use their information
- leave enough time to check that you have all the facts you need and that they are correct and up-to-date.

Some of the places you can find information

There are numerous information sources you could choose from – these are just a few:

- Libraries – a librarian may be able to help you locate what you need.
- Universities – often have an extensive library with focused research documents.
- Government departments (local, national, statistical office) – information on policies and statistics for all areas and issues in the country.
- NGOs, churches and research institutions – often have specific poverty focused research documents and information.
- Donors and international institutions – often have detailed analysis going back many years.
- Internet – a lot of information if you know where to look (see Resources SECTION C6).
- The media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television) – local and up-to-date information.
- Public meetings and personal contacts – often first-hand information that is not written down.

The sources of information will provide you with many different types of information, including:

- government reports and statistics
- independent reports and documents
- environmental assessments
- poverty indicators
- eye-witness accounts
- legal evidence
- church records
- community records
- academic documents
- human rights reports
- reports from international institutions
- media articles

Using a variety of sources and types of information can help to provide a balanced picture, verify facts, understand the latest developments, identify possible allies and opponents and understand the arguments of any opponents.

Exercise

Split the participants into two groups. One group brainstorms **types** of information that would be useful in advocacy work. The other brainstorms **sources** of information that are available to the group concerned. In plenary, the participants compare the lists. The results can be written down and used as a resource for the participants' advocacy work.

How others may perceive your different sources of information

INFORMATION SOURCE OR TYPE OF INFORMATION	POTENTIAL FACTORS IN ITS FAVOUR: AS SEEN BY OTHERS	POTENTIAL FACTORS AGAINST: AS SEEN BY OTHERS
Government reports	Good research Access to good information Good to use if lobbying government	Biased towards ruling party or particular existing policy Not very self-critical
Eye witness account	Adds legitimacy and new facts	Subjective and one-sided
Media	In public domain, easily accessible and widely read BBC is respected	Political bias and may report only one side of story
Legal evidence	Reliable and trusted information	Can be difficult to understand
Other NGO reports	Independent evidence, on the side of the poor	Pushing a particular line (anti-government/business), amateur
Trade Unions	Representative of members, personal evidence	Political and antagonistic
International institutions	Accurate, reliable and comprehensive information	Biased towards own institutional mandate such as trade liberalisation
Academic	Independent and thorough	Difficult to understand

**Using information well**

Effective advocacy depends on how you use the information. Some types of information or information sources may be seen by policy-makers and those in power as more trustworthy or more legitimate than others. It is important to understand how information may be viewed by those you are trying to influence and how much they will listen to you on the basis of the information you provide. The table above suggests how different types of information may be viewed by those you are trying to influence.

**TOOL 12****Assessing information for bias and usefulness**

**Aim** To assess the information for bias and usefulness.

Sources of information are rarely without bias in what they say and why they are reporting in the first place. It is therefore important to understand:

- who or what is behind the information source
- why it has been produced
- why the conclusions have been reached.

It is also important to assess the information to see:

- whether the facts are accurate and up-to-date
- whether you agree with any analysis or policy conclusions.

**Exercise**

Ask participants to put a range of articles, magazines, newspapers and reports in order of usefulness. Ask them why they have placed the information in this order. Present the questions below and then ask the participants if they would want to change their original order.

Some questions to ask in order to assess whether information is trustworthy are:

**VALUES** What values are behind the source of information? Do you agree with them?

**PURPOSE** Why is this organisation providing the information? Does this affect how you view it? Do you trust the source?

**ACCURACY** What facts are used? Are they supported by your evidence? Are they represented fairly? Is the information up-to-date? Is anything obvious missed out?

**ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS** How are the conclusions reached? Is this logical and based on the evidence shown? Are there any assumptions, either explicit or implicit? Do you agree with these? What changes would you suggest?

**POOR / VULNERABLE** What concern is shown for poor or marginalised groups?

**PERCEPTION** How will others view the information?

**USEFULNESS** Based on the above, in what ways can you use the information?