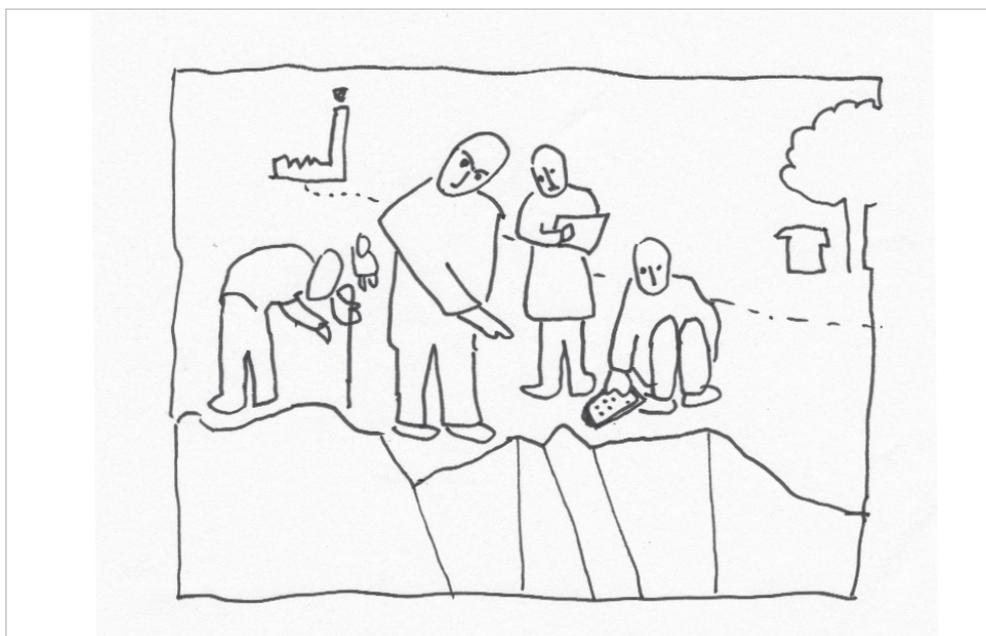


CHAPTER 4

GATHERING INFORMATION FOR POWERFUL ACTION - *INVESTIGATION* *TOOL*



Money in the hands of the rich is source of power for domination.
Information in the hands of the poor is source of power for liberation

When communities make allegations and demands, the common response from corporations and hostile government officials is that there is no evidence. Or they may say that the community does not understand the problem. Attacking the community's argument is a way of weakening community power to take up the issue.

The community is more likely be taken seriously when it gives a clear description of what the problem is, who it affects, how it affects them, and what causes the problem. Potential allies will be encouraged to

give support to the community and this will place the community in a stronger position from which to build an action. The media will be interested in the community story. Even government officials may listen to the arguments.

The community can get these clear ideas through investigating the problem. Information collected from investigation to support community voice and action may consist of simple statements about what the community experiences, sees and hears. The information could be made up of hand drawn maps, cell phone photographs or voice notes accompanied by clear statements on what happened, to whom, where, how and when. This information may look simple, but it is valid information that could be used to make strong arguments.

Gathering this information can itself help in organising the community. Organising takes place when the community is actively involved in the process of gathering the information. Meeting with community members, involving them in visiting the site of the problem, in interviewing people and discussing the findings with them, can raise the awareness of the community, and prepare them for action.

In this chapter we set out guidelines for systematic investigation.

4.1

The Investigation Tool

The investigation tool consists of a series of steps which the activist group should follow carefully. This will require many short meetings and field work.

STEP 1

DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM YOU WANT TO INVESTIGATE, WHY IT IS IMPORTANT, WHETHER IT IS DOABLE, AND WRITE A STATEMENT OF MOTIVATION.

The group answers the following questions to get a clear idea of the problem they want to investigate:

- i. What is the problem?
- ii. Who does the problem affect and how does it affect them?
- iii. Where does the problem occur?
- iv. When does the problem occur?

The group then looks at why it is important to investigate this problem.

- v. Will resolving the problem benefit the community and why?
- vi. Who in the community will benefit when the problem is resolved?
- vii. Will the community support actions to resolve the problem?

The group then considers if this investigation is “doable” given their time and resources.

- viii. What amount of time do you have to do the investigation?
- ix. Can it be done in the time you have?

- x. Can you get the information you need?
- xi. Do you have the resources needed to conduct the investigation (money, skills equipment)?
- xii. Can the investigation be narrowed down to fit into the time and resources you have?

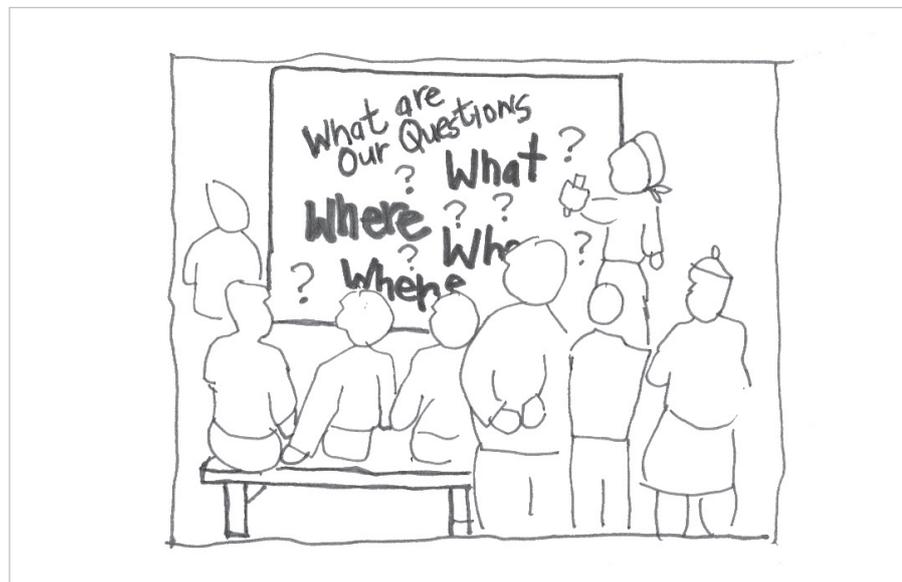
The group then writes a statement motivating their investigation.

The problem we want to investigate is
Our reasons for doing this investigation is ...
We hope to complete this investigation by...

STEP 2

WHAT ARE YOUR QUESTIONS AND WHERE WILL YOU GET ANSWERS

Gathering of information for the investigation will be guided by questions about the problem, who it affects, the causes, who is responsible and what the solution is. The group writes down all the questions that come to mind, and discusses where they will find answers to these questions.



Our Questions	Where we will find or get answers
1	
2	
3	

STEP 3 PLAN YOUR INVESTIGATION AND IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN

Group members would need to interview many people, visit sites in the community, and do searches in libraries and on the internet. It is important that the group develops a plan for information gathering – setting out who will do what and by when. And it is important that the group implements their plan in a disciplined way.

It will help to develop a calendar of activities to guide implementation as in the following example:

Date	Action	Who
June		
1	Interview with three community members	
3	Visit the site of the problem	
6	Make interview appointments with Councilor and local doctor	
7	Do internet search	
10	Write notes on the finding	
14	Meet to review finding	

STEP 4 DOING THE INVESTIGATION

Before the interview or information search

Use a special notebook to write down all your notes, questions and responses during your interview or search.

Write down the questions you will ask.

During the interview

Write down the date and place of the interview; the name of the person being interviewed and their contact details; the position in the organisation of the person you are interviewing.

– Take notes on the responses of the person being interviewed.

If new questions come up write this down in your notes.

-- Listen for and write down more detailed notes on responses which are important when you write up your notes

NOTE

The following is a list of usual places and people from where and whom we would get information when investigating a community problem

- The place where the problem is being experienced
- The people who are experiencing the problem
- The people or organisation (company) who are causing the problem
- The government official responsible for dealing with such problems
- An expert (any person likely to have a deep knowledge of the problem). This can be a professional or an elder in the community.
- Books and reports in the local library
- Web sites on the internet

After the interview

As soon as possible after your interviews, read all your notes and write these out in clear sentences.

Internet Search

Write down the name of the internet site or web address referred to as the URL.

Write down the title of the document you got the information from and the name of the author or organisation that wrote or published the document.

Write down the key points from the document that provide information on the problem you are investigating

STEP 5

PUTTING YOUR FINDINGS TOGETHER

Once you have concluded your investigation you will need to review the information you have gathered with the group. This step should take place before you start writing your report or story.

Each investigator will write up on a flip chart the question she or he investigated and the information she or he found. Members of the group may ask questions for clarification or make comments. Important points arising in discussion are written on the flip chart.

After all the investigators have presented their information, each one summarises their findings, writing this up on a new sheet of paper as follows:

- What facts have we found about the problem we have investigated
- What are our conclusions?
- What further information do we need, who will get this information and by when will they get this?

NOTE

- The investigators note books, the written reports, and the chart papers are important documents and must be kept in a safe place for possible use later.
- Keep a record of important statements you heard in your interviews as “quotes.” These can be used when you write your report or article.
- Write down proper names of people and the positions they occupy in an organisation.
- Write down the proper name of organisations, government departments or companies you visit in your investigation