Checklist 1: Assessment

This guideline provides an assessment of the current situation. The four key areas that need to be assessed are:

1. The problem
2. The context
3. Target groups
4. Project resources

The Problem

- What is the problem you plan to address?
- What are the most common or serious consequences of the problem?
- What can you already say about the problem?
    - Is it getting worse?
    - Who are most affected by the problem? How would you describe the persons (young, old, male, female, from a certain area, small or large scale, etc.)?
    - Are there specific groups or individuals that are causing or able to manage the problem?
    - How can the problem be measured?
    - What are all the possible ways you could address the problem?
    - What are the most cost-effective ways to prevent the problem?
    - Who are potential experts you should interview to get more information on the problem?

The Context

- What trends or other factors might affect the situation or circumstances in which your communicative activities will take place?
- Which groups, leaders, or other individuals, do you foresee supporting or opposing your project or campaign (you might also do a stakeholder analysis if necessary)?
- Are there any policies or laws that might affect your ambitions or possibility to reach the goals (that is, understanding the limitations of communication as a tool for change)?
- Are there any other initiatives taken addressing the same issue?
- What external opportunities could you take advantage of?
- What external threats will you plan and prepare for?

The target groups

Primary groups
We usually need to start by targeting those that are directly involved in the situation that needs to be managed (causing or increasing the problem we want to address, f.i., spreading of diseases). In order to make the most effective use of your limited communications resources you need to develop a clear understanding of exactly why they think or act in the ways that they do:

- Exactly who is part of the problem (causing, increasing, managing, solving, etc.)?
- How are they effecting the problem?

- What do they currently think about the issue or problem (from not aware to frustration over the lack of practical tools to be used)?
- What costs and benefits do they perceive in acting in an old or a new way?
- What would you like them to do after your intervention?
- Is the change easy to understand and implement?
- What costs and benefits would your audience associate with this change?
- What would best motivate them to change? What help will they need (from you and others)?

Often the people you want to communicate with may not even be aware that they are part of the problem you want to address. If your communications appear to be pointing the finger or blaming them for the problem then you will almost certainly lose their support or cooperation before you have even started. In any form of communications the key to success is to know your target group.

Secondary groups that support and influence primary groups
Another focus of a communication plan is to gain the support of key decision-makers responsible for allocating resources and developing policies and institutions necessary to achieve your goals. As a result, you may need to develop strategic alliances with, and communication activities for, organisational representatives (f.i., bee-keeping associations), local or regional leader (f.i., financial support), government (f.i., creating a conducive policy context) and non-government organisations (f.i., as ambassadors), politicians, donors, media and other groups and individuals.

- What groups or individuals are most likely to influence the perceptions and actions of your primary target group? This may also include political constituents and mass media.
- Who does your target group trust to provide them with accurate information? Is it possible to co-operate with them in your communication activities?
- What are their main sources of information today?
- Who do they usually ask questions about the topic?
- Will the target groups respond better to a peer (another bee-keeper or colleague), an authority figure, or a celebrity associated with your issue?

Investigating more about your target group
If you feel you need to know more about the knowledge, attitudes, and awareness of your target group, you can always use a number of available audience research methods.

Methods can be either **qualitative** (e.g. asking people questions), **quantitative** (e.g. counting how many people think or do something), or a combination of the two. Examples include focus groups, interviews, surveys, or just plain old observation of sample target audiences. The size of your target audience may influence the methods you choose. With large audiences, quantitative tools may be easier. With smaller audiences, qualitative tools such as focus groups or interviews are more effective.

If you can segment your audiences into groups with similar needs, you can be more effective in - tailoring your messages, channels and products. Possible groups could be based on location, size of operation, ethnicity, technological system, experience, etc. The goal of "segmenting" your audience is to identify groups of people who are like each other (e.g. have the same views or habits) and more likely to respond to particular messages in similar ways.

<u>Project Resources</u>

You need to match your communicative ambitions with the resources available to you. In some cases you may need to either narrow your focus or get more funding.

- What is the total budget available for your communications activities?
- Where is the funding coming from?
- Do you need to seek additional funding before proceeding with the project?
- Is the project feasible to develop and implement at this time?
- Can more funding be easily secured?
- How much time do you and members of your team have to devote to communication activities?
- Can you include experienced/professional communicators in your team from existing colleagues or do you need to contract externally? Do you manage without such competence?
- What level of access does your organisation have to the main/primary target groups?