



EMPATHISE

DEFINE

## The Design Process

# Empathise and define

The Discover and Understand phase seeks to build a deep, contextualized, and critical understanding of the realities, capabilities, aspirations, and barriers faced by people affected by a crisis before considering any technological solutions.

It does not start with technology as an automatic response. It starts with people.

## 1. Objective

To build a solid foundation of understanding about:

- \* Real problems and priorities.
- \* Exclusion and inequality.
- \* Digital capabilities and limitations.
- \* Power dynamics and trust.
- \* Comparative value between digital and non-digital options.

This phase reduces the risk of designing irrelevant or harmful solutions.

## 2. Introduction for the facilitator

In this phase, the facilitator will find tools to investigate without assuming, listen without directing, and analyze without rushing to propose solutions. It is time to slow down the operational urgency and generate clarity before deciding.

Discover and Understand is not a superficial preliminary stage; it is the process's protective mechanism. It allows for the identification of invisible risks, structural inequalities, and trust dynamics that can determine the success or failure of any digital intervention.

The usefulness of this phase lies in its prevention of costly mistakes, unintended exclusions, and technologically sophisticated but socially inappropriate solutions.

### 3. How to use this phase

Use this phase when:	Do not use this phase to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* A digital solution is being considered.</li> <li>* There is pressure to innovate quickly.</li> <li>* There is no clarity about real needs.</li> <li>* Potential risks of exclusion are identified.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Validate a solution that has already been decided upon.</li> <li>* Justify a pre-existing tool.</li> <li>* Gather information without returning results.</li> </ul>

### 4. Pre-Activity Checklist

**Before starting any activity:**

- We have suspended any previous technological decisions.
- We can clearly explain why we are consulting.
- We know how the information collected will be used.
- We have identified possible excluded groups.
- We are familiar with applicable ethical and data protection frameworks.
- We are prepared to accept that technology may not be necessary.

### 5. Activities

#### User Research

**Purpose**

To understand real experiences, barriers, aspirations, and everyday practices.

**Facilitator Guidance**

- \* Prioritize less visible voices.
- \* Ask open-ended questions.
- \* Do not introduce solutions prematurely.
- \* Record people’s exact language.
- \* Do not raise expectations.
- \* What data is involved?
- \* Where is the data stored?



## How to facilitate in a crisis

- \* Short, focused sessions.
- \* Private, safe spaces.
- \* Possible sessions separated by gender or digital confidence.
- \* Adapt language according to literacy.

## Suggested methods

- \* Focus group discussions.
- \* Key informant interviews.
- \* Contextual observation (where feasible).
- \* Co-creative exploratory conversations.

## Specific checklist

- Diverse groups were included.
- Real barriers were explored.
- Perceptions of trust were identified.
- Perceived risks were documented.
- Steering responses toward digital solutions was avoided.

## Needs Assessment

### Purpose

Assess actual technological capabilities, limitations, and conditions.

### Facilitator Guidance

Do not assume that:

- \* Smartphone = individual access.
- \* Connectivity = stable.
- \* Literacy = digital literacy.

Explore:

- \* Device sharing.
- \* Data costs.
- \* Electricity.
- \* Level of digital trust.



## How to facilitate in a crisis

- \* Use simple, concrete questions.
- \* Observe rather than infer.
- \* Validate information with multiple sources.

## Suggested methods

- \* Short surveys.
- \* Digital access mapping.
- \* Individual conversations.

## Specific checklist

- Device access was assessed.
- Actual connectivity was assessed.
- Applications already in use were explored.
- Gender or age gaps were identified.
- Phone sharing was analyzed.

## Stakeholder Analysis

### Purpose

Identify key actors, power dynamics, and representation.

### Facilitator Guidance

- \* Map actual influence, not just formal positions.
- \* Identify gatekeepers.
- \* Detect unrepresented groups.
- \* Assess levels of trust in leaders.

## How to facilitate in a crisis

- \* Do not rely solely on formal leaders.
- \* Cross-reference information from different sources.
- \* Consider informal and digital actors.

## Suggested methods

- \* Actor mapping.
- \* Influence-interest matrix.
- \* Community validation of the map.



## Specific checklist

- Formal and informal leaders were identified.
- Women's and disability committees were considered.
- Digital influencers were identified.
- Power dynamics were analyzed.

## Information Needs

### Purpose

Understand information needs and communication preferences.

### Facilitator Guidance

Ask explicitly:

- \* What information they need.
- \* In what language.
- \* In what format.
- \* What risks they perceive.
- \* How they want to receive updates.

Always clarify:

- \* Why you are asking.
- \* How the information will be used.
- \* When they will receive feedback.

### How to facilitate in a crisis

- \* Use concrete examples.
- \* Validate understanding.
- \* Explore misinformation and rumors.

### Suggested methods

- \* Community consultations.
- \* Channel mapping.
- \* Record frequent rumors.

## Specific checklist

- Preferred languages were identified.
- Reliable channels were mapped.



- Level of trust was assessed.
- Ability to detect misinformation explored.

## 6. Specific considerations in emergencies

### Access and exclusion

- \* Who does not have access to services?
- \* What structural barriers exist?

### Language and communication

- \* Differences between oral and written.
- \* Reliable vs. avoided channels.

### Real digital access

- \* Devices.
- \* Connectivity.
- \* Electricity.
- \* Costs.

### Existing digital practices

- \* Applications already in use.
- \* Channels avoided and reasons.

### Trust and misinformation

- \* Level of skepticism.
- \* Rumor tracking mechanisms.

### Comparative value

- \* Does technology improve the situation?
- \* Are there safer non-digital alternatives?

### Operational perspective

- \* Challenges for humanitarian personnel.
- \* Institutional capacities.



## 7. Expected outcome

At the end of this phase, the team should be able to answer:

- \* What is the real problem?
- \* Who is excluded?
- \* What risks exist?
- \* Does technology add value?
- \* What do we not yet know?

If these answers are not clear, the phase is not complete.

*“In crisis contexts, this phase is not about generating ideas—it is about preventing harm before ideas are generated.”*