



HOW-TO: Using the ELOM Tools for a
Community Assessment

How to use the ELOM tools for a community assessment



What is a community assessment?

A community assessment is a process used to identify and prioritise the needs and assets of a particular community. This is an important step in the planning stages of a programme or policy. This process involves collecting and analysing data to understand the gaps between current conditions and a programme's desired or envisioned impact, enabling implementing organisations to allocate resources and design interventions that address the most critical issues or needs within the target community. In addition, the assessment can identify strengths and assets within a community that can be mobilised to address these needs and/or support or enable programme planning and implementation.

For our purposes, a "**community**" can be understood as a group of individuals residing in a particular geographical area that may also share common characteristics, such as culture, language, or socio-economic conditions. The community is the target population for which needs, assets, and gaps are identified to inform the design of interventions. It also includes stakeholders such as local leaders, service providers, and other relevant local actors who are engaged around the particular issue being addressed (e.g., early learning needs for young children in the community).

Community assessment plays an important role in the context of organisations supporting early learning programmes (ELPs). By systematically identifying both the needs and assets of a community, organisations can design early learning interventions that are not only responsive to the specific needs of children and their families, but also leverage existing community strengths. Using local, standardised instruments like the **ELOM suite of early learning measurement tools** can assist organisations to gather precise data on children's development, programme quality, and home learning factors. The ELOM suite of tools has been developed for use in South African communities, and is designed to provide culturally fair data on key aspects of early learning and child development.

This how-to guide breaks down the steps involved in a community assessment, and tips for incorporating the ELOM suite of tools in the process.

KEY STEPS OF A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



Define the purpose and scope

Clarify why the assessment is being conducted and outline its boundaries.



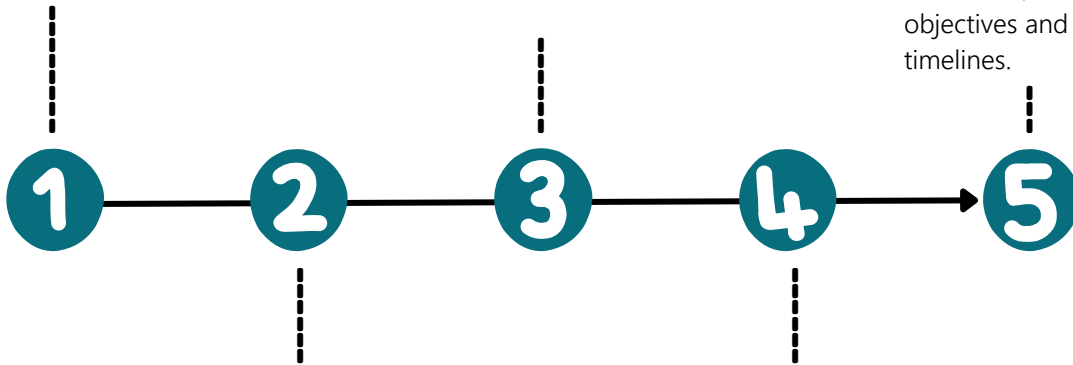
Collect data

Gather quantitative and qualitative data to assess the community's needs and strengths, using tools like the ELOM suite.



Develop an intervention strategy

Create a strategic plan to address prioritised needs, leveraging community strengths and assets, with clear objectives and timelines.



Identify stakeholders

Engage key stakeholders to gather diverse perspectives and establish whether the intervention is relevant and well-supported.



Analyse data

Analyse the data to identify gaps between current conditions and desired outcomes, and prioritise needs with stakeholders.

STEP ONE: Define the purpose and scope

Clearly articulate why the community assessment is being conducted. This often revolves around identifying needs in the community, as well as key strengths or assets, to design and plan effective interventions, and allocate resources efficiently. This step is also needed to determine the boundaries of the assessment such as the specific population, historical aspects of relevance (e.g., changes in policy or governance, or prior attempts at intervention), the geographical area, and the particular issues or needs of focus.

STEP TWO: Identify stakeholders

Identify key stakeholders, such as community members, local leaders, service providers, municipal or government actors, and funders. Engaging these stakeholders ensures that diverse perspectives are considered when framing community needs, desired outcomes or goals, and potential solutions. This is key to ensuring that the intervention will be a good fit for existing conditions, services, infrastructure, and cultural norms. Finally, stakeholder engagement can help to foster a sense of community support, trust, and collaboration.

Stakeholders should be actively involved throughout the assessment process. They provide key insights during data collection, and following the assessment, they can help to ensure that the findings are relevant and credible.

STEP THREE: Collect data

Collect data that describes, as accurately as possible, the community's needs and strengths. Qualitative data can be collected from key stakeholders, as described above. 'Felt' needs can be discussed with stakeholders using qualitative approaches, such as workshops, interviews, community forums, or focus groups. This involves gathering the stakeholders' perspectives on what they feel is needed by community members. It is recommended that the findings of the assessment are presented to those stakeholders who shared their insights for their confirmation and feedback. During this feedback session, stakeholders can be consulted in the identification of key outcomes or goals that they collectively perceive as important to work toward to meet the identified needs (e.g., children aged five are ready to enter formal schooling).

Existing evidence and literature should also be examined to understand prevailing demand for services, historical trends and patterns, as well as lessons from previous intervention strategies in similar contexts.

Finally, primary quantitative data can be collected to form a baseline assessment of the selected community outcomes to be monitored over time. The ELOM suite of tools provides standardised South African instruments that can be administered during baseline assessments to establish the current status of outcomes, such as:

- Four- to five-year old children's performance in key developmental domains using the **ELOM 4&5** assessment tool.
- Grade-R children's performance in mathematics and language using the **ELOM-R Mathematics and ELOM-R Language** assessment tools.
- Four- to seven-year old children's social-emotional functioning using the **ELOM Social-Emotional Rating Scale**.
- The classroom quality of early learning programmes (ELPs) using the **ELOM Learning Programme Quality Assessment** (LPQA).
- Aspects of children's home learning environment associated with early language, cognitive and numerical development, using the **ELOM Home Learning Environment** (HLE) tool.

These tools can provide relevant quantitative data on baseline indicators of interest. Examples are provided in the table below.

Tools	Example community assessment questions	Example indicators	Examples of interventions
ELOM 4&5	What is the developmental status of young children in the community?	Proportion of children aged four to five On Track, Falling Behind, and Falling Far Behind on ELOM domains	ELP curriculum design
ELOM-R Mathematics		Proportion of Grade R children On Track, Falling Behind, or Falling Far Behind for numeracy & mathematics	
ELOM Social-Emotional		Proportion of children meeting age-appropriate standards for social relations and school readiness	
ELOM LPQA	Are ELPs being delivered with quality in the community?	Average LPQA score of a sample of ELPs	ELP teacher training and support strategies; resource provision
ELOM HLE	To what extent do children have access to early learning stimulation at home?	Proportion of children with early learning resources in their home	Caregiver training and support strategies; resource provision

STEP FOUR: Data analysis

This step includes analysing the collected data to identify gaps between the community's current situation and the desired outcomes or goals identified alongside stakeholders, as well as established benchmarks or normative standards (such as the ELOM standards).

For example, you and your stakeholders may have agreed on the following goal: 80% of children aged four- to five-years old should be On Track in the ELOM developmental domains. You might then compare a sample of children's baseline ELOM scores to this goal to determine the gap.

STEP FIVE: Develop an intervention strategy

The needs that you identify should be prioritised based on factors such as severity, urgency, feasibility of change, and the potential impact of addressing them (see the list below). Prioritisation ensures that resources are directed towards the most critical issues. The prioritisation process can be done with your stakeholders to ensure that this process reflects their perspectives and experiences.

- **Severity:** How critical or severe is this need? How many people are being affected and to what extent?
- **Urgency:** Is there a need to act on this immediately? What are the consequences of a delay for the community? Are there external deadlines or timing constraints?
- **Feasibility:** How likely is it that an intervention designed to address this issue will succeed? How practical would this be in light of resources, capacity and community readiness and support?
- **Potential impact:** To what extent will addressing this need benefit the community now and in the long-term?

During this process, assess how these needs can be fully or partially addressed using existing community assets, and the extent to which additional external support is needed. Collaborating with existing service providers or programmes that align with the prioritised needs may help to ensure that new interventions are more feasible and sustainable. By building on existing assets, you can avoid duplicating efforts and wasting resources, and instead contribute to community capacity.

Collaborative initiatives also have the strategic advantage of larger networks that can be mobilised to enhance the impact of the initiative, as well as an enhanced alignment with the cultural and traditional context of the community.

Developing a strategic intervention plan involves outlining specific actions to address the prioritised needs and engage community strengths and assets. A strong strategy may include deliberate intervention or programme design steps, such as an evidence review of intervention strategies and the development of a Theory of Change. The plan should include clear objectives, activities, timelines, resource allocations, and responsible parties to ensure effective implementation.

SUMMARY

A community assessment is an essential tool for NGOs working to improve the lives of children and other vulnerable populations in South Africa. By systematically identifying and prioritising community needs and strengths, NGOs can develop targeted, effective, and efficient interventions that maximise their impact by closely aligning with existing community assets. The use of culturally fair and standardised measurement tools, like the ELOM suite of early learning measurement tools, enhances the reliability of the data collected, ensuring that the needs of children and their families are accurately assessed and addressed.