

2.b



# RSS STEP 2

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT (PILLAR 2)



Version: 23 December 2015

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### THE RSS FIELD GUIDES

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| RSS 2.a        | Risk Assessment (Pillar 1)         |
| <b>RSS 2.b</b> | <b>Needs Assessment (Pillar 2)</b> |
| RSS 3.         | Developing an Action Plan          |
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# 2.b

## RSS Step 2.b: Needs Assessment

RSS Step 2 focuses on the collection of the information needed to plan and implement an RSS programme. This means collecting information on the risks of poor production practices in the smallholder supply base, and information on smallholders' livelihoods and need for support. Step 2 is therefore split into two sections:

RSS 2.a: Risk assessment

RSS 2.b: Needs assessment

In practice it may be efficient to combine them. This field guide provides guidance on the needs assessment.

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# 1. Introduction

Step 2.b involves the assessment of smallholders' need for support in three key areas. The support part of RSS is known as Pillar 2.

The objectives of the smallholder needs assessment are to:

- Assess smallholders' needs related to improving their agricultural production and livelihoods.
- Prioritise the needs for support.

## A note about 'you'

Throughout the RSS field guides we refer to 'you'. In reality 'you' is the person who is responsible for making this particular step of the RSS framework happen. This may be someone who works directly within the Implementing Entity, or someone who is hired in or is working on behalf of your organisation. Although responsibility for implementing parts of RSS may be delegated, the overall responsibility to make RSS happen remains with the lead person.

Figure 1: Pillar 2: Support for Smallholders

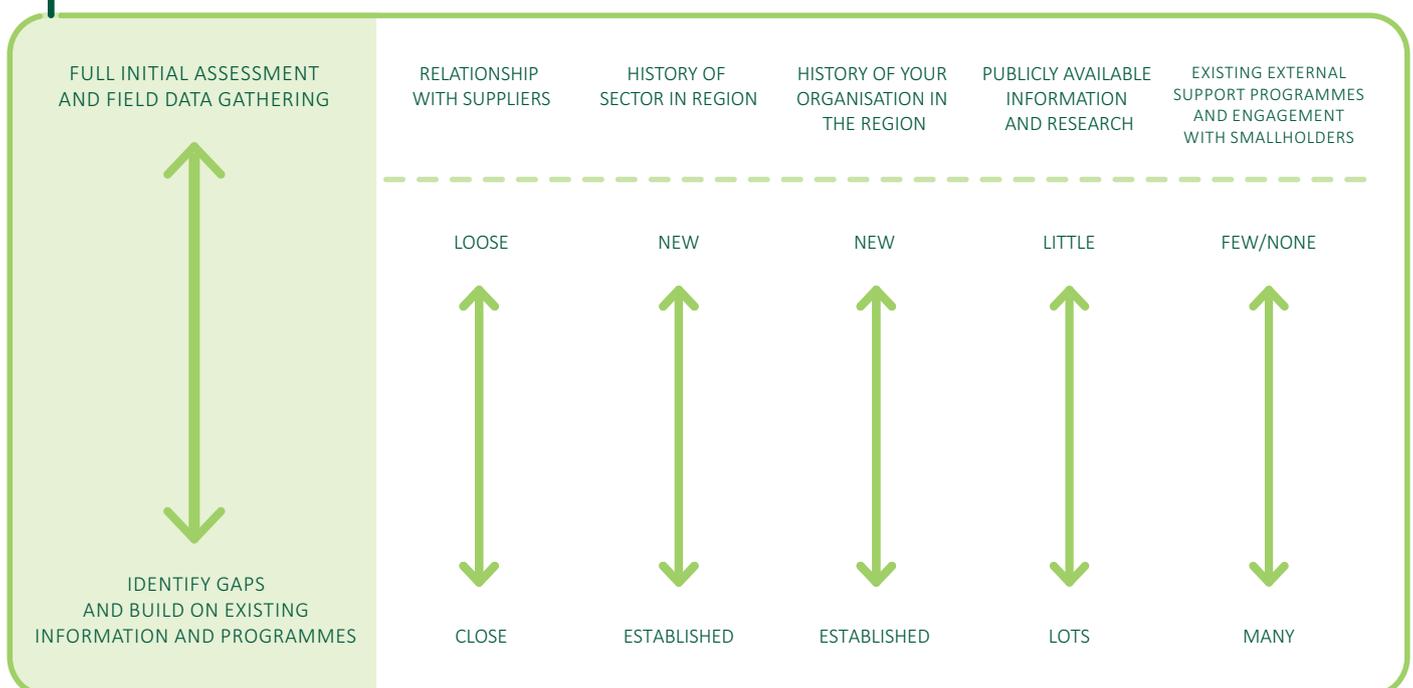


## 2. Preparation

Although the risk assessment and needs assessment are presented separately as Steps 2.a and 2.b, in practice, it may be efficient to do them together. However, the purpose for the two assessments and the sources of information may be different, so you should discuss whether and how to combine the assessments as part of the preparation phase.

Organisations will enter the RSS process with variable levels of information about their smallholder supply base. The desired intensity of your needs assessment depends on how much information you already have. During the preparation phase, assess what information is already available, and what initiatives and forms of support to farmers already exist within and outside your organisation. The more you know about your smallholder base to start with, the more you'll be able to build on existing information and programmes. After preparation, an initial assessment and subsequent field-based risk assessment can then focus on filling the gaps.

Figure 2: Aspects that help to determine the scope of assessment



## 2.1 Assigning roles

The needs assessment can be carried out by internal staff from your organisation or external specialists. Whoever is responsible for overseeing it needs a clear understanding of the social, economic and agronomic issues that exist in the supply base area.

Decide who will carry out the assessment. This depends on:

- The size and potential impact of the smallholder supply base included in the RSS process.
- The extent, type and likely prioritisation of the needs.
- Your organisation's capacity and expertise to undertake the assessment itself.

## 2.2. Collecting baseline information – the initial needs assessment

As part of the preparation, you should collect baseline information on needs for support by farmers in the supply base and on what support is already being provided. This will help you to focus on specific areas in the full needs assessment.

The collection of baseline information can be 'desk-based' and it can use information that is readily available to people in your organisation and the key stakeholders you identified in RSS Step 1 (or your Advisory Group if you have one). You don't need to consult widely with other stakeholders at this stage; this happens in the information-gathering phase.

Table 1 provides a list of potential areas that you may wish to explore during the initial and field-based assessment. It is provided as guidance and there may be other areas that you find relevant. You will need to decide whether you need to explore all these areas, to skip some areas or to add more issues when collecting information.

Table 1: Potential areas of support for smallholders

Key areas of support	Potential support activities
Better yields and food security	Yield improvement through support in selection/provision of quality seeds, replanting material, harvesting practices
	Subsistence farming, intercropping
	Improve farm management, ranging from tillage to planting depth and distance
Improved livelihoods and institutions	Organisation of smallholders
	Access to finance
	Access to training and capacity building
	Business planning – documentation and record keeping
Better agricultural practices	Equality of opportunities
	Product quality control
	Pest and weed management
	Soil and water management

## 2.3. Identifying who to consult

The needs assessment is an interactive process, which involves consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. You should as a minimum consult and involve smallholders' representatives and smallholders themselves.

The information that you gathered as part of the initial assessment provides the basis for a list of issues you need to explore with stakeholders. Next you need to identify people and organisations to consult on each issue (see also Section 3 of RSS Field Guide 1, on setting up a consultation mechanism). You will probably identify additional people to consult throughout the assessment and during implementation of RSS.



### Hints and tips

#### Who to consult for the needs assessment

Consider the following issues as part of the needs assessment:

- **Plan the consultation process in advance** as much as possible, to ensure that stakeholders have time to meet with you and provide appropriate input.
- Engage with the smallholders' representatives and smallholders themselves to identify their support needs. Consultation with smallholder groups and representatives should be an integral part of the needs assessment. This will help to ensure that the process of assessing smallholders' needs is **fair, transparent, credible and objective** and that it identifies genuine needs.
- Ensure that all **different types of farmers and variations in circumstances** are considered in the selection of smallholders to consult. For example, consider differences between farmers in the supply base in terms of their level of organisation, relation to the company, distance to collection points, existing production practices etc.
- Consult people who can give you an accurate picture of the current situation. It is important to **capture the variation in smallholders' circumstances** within a target group or supply base area.
- Consult **women and vulnerable people**, including the old and young people. Talking only to village elites or leading farmers will not give you a balanced picture of smallholders' needs.

## 3. Gathering field-based information on needs

Through your preparation you will have identified a list of issues to consult people about; and a list of people or organisations to consult. You now need to gather field-based information on each of these issues. This will allow you to identify the priority needs of smallholders that you will address as part of RSS.

### 3.1. Scope of information

Smallholders may have many and varied needs. These may include issues as varied as access to good schools and school materials, access to clean water, and difficulties with the transport of raw materials. To help you decide which issues you will include as part of the needs assessment, take the following steps:

#### a. Apply boundaries.

The farmer needs assessment should only consider areas related to:

- Smallholder commodity production; and/or
- Long-term improvement of smallholders' livelihoods; and/or
- Overall performance in relation to the core sustainability issues in the smallholder supply base.

#### b. Use the baseline information as a starting point.

The baseline indicates where support may be needed, and also what support is already being provided by others. Focus on

collecting information about smallholders' needs in areas where the baseline identifies gaps in existing support.

#### c. Use Table 1: Potential areas of support for smallholders to narrow down the scope.

You can share a list of these areas with the smallholders, their representatives and other stakeholders to provide a framework for discussing smallholders' needs for support.

However, the list is not meant to be prescriptive or limiting. Smallholders may need other types of support in a particular context. Consider those needs in addition to the pre-defined categories listed in Table 1.

### 3.2. Sources of information

Once you have identified who to consult and decided on the scope of the assessment, you will need to organise consultation events. There are many possible ways that you can consult stakeholders, including meetings with smallholders and their representatives, workshops, discussions in the field, and written, on-line and telephone communication. The exact form of consultation will depend on local circumstances and expectations, and the type of stakeholder you are contacting.

Annex 1 provides some example questions to ask when gathering detailed information on farmers' needs. The questions and level of detail provided for each category in Annex 1 **are guidance only**. You may wish to add others, or leave some out as appropriate for your situation.

## 4. Assessing importance of needs

### 4.1. Validating the findings

To make sure that your findings are accurate, summarise the main findings and conclusions of the needs assessment and discuss them with key stakeholders and key staff within your organisation. If possible, jointly review the needs identified. Look for connections between the needs that have been identified, and consider whether any of them can be combined.

You may also need to present your findings more widely, for example to:

- Representatives of the people and organisations consulted. This will help you to confirm that smallholders' needs are accurately identified before you start prioritising and planning the support you will provide.
- (Senior) management of your organisation. This will allow senior managers to understand the issues you have identified, raise any questions or concerns at an early stage, highlight their priorities, and get an idea of the scale of support your organisation will need to provide.

### 4.2. Prioritising support

Through RSS you cannot address all the needs of a rural community at the same time. Once needs have been identified, you must decide how important they are, how much support will be desired and how you will prioritise the support your organisation provides.

For each need that has been identified through the consultation, consider how important it is for your organisation to provide support to address that need.



### Hints and tips Ranking farmers' needs

During consultations, smallholders or their representatives may describe all or most of their needs as highly significant. To help everyone involved in the discussions to identify where the needs are most important, ask farmers and other stakeholders to rank and prioritise the needs that they have identified as high and/or medium significance. For example, you might ask farmers to select the two most important issues or to rank their priorities on a scale of 1 to 5. Clearly explain the focus of the RSS process and that resources to provide support are limited, so that only the most significant issues can be addressed.

You may wish to classify the needs as high, medium and low importance to be addressed as part of the RSS. This will provide a basis for prioritising needs, and planning how to provide support in the next phase.

**Table 2: Assessing importance of smallholders' need for support**

Need expressed	Importance
Farmers indicated a need for support in this area and there is no or very limited access to support. Providing support can be expected to result in major improvements in smallholders' production and livelihoods.	<b>HIGH IMPORTANCE</b>
Farmers expressed a need for support in this area. There may already be some support available, but it is inadequate or inaccessible. Providing (additional) support can be expected to make a positive and clear contribution to improving smallholders' production and livelihoods.	<b>MEDIUM IMPORTANCE</b>
Farmers indicated that there is a limited need for support, or that some support is already available. Farmers have not expressed a clear need for support or how they would benefit from it. Providing (additional) support is not likely to significantly change smallholders' production or livelihoods.	<b>LOW IMPORTANCE</b>

Areas of high or medium importance should be prioritised for support. Within these areas, you may wish to consider that if smallholders are working in organised groups, support can be delivered more effectively and can contribute to empowering them.

Once you have arrived at a prioritised list of the needs that you propose to address, you should again consult with key stakeholders and key staff in your organisation. Seek feedback also from a selected group of smallholders and smallholder representatives in the supply base, to check that the prioritisation of support needs is accurate and appropriate.

Based on the results of this needs assessment, you will need to decide whether to redefine the objectives and target group that you defined during the preparation and scoping (RSS Step 1).

## 5. Documenting findings

You can use Annex 1 to document the findings and observations gathered during the needs assessment.

As noted in Section 3.2, it is not always essential to cover each area of support and related questions. If the baseline information and common knowledge suggest that there is no need for support in a particular area, you can ignore the questions related to that area.

However, if you decide to skip an area of support it is good practice to record a brief explanation of the reasons. This can be included in the final column of Annex 1.

You can summarise the priority needs identified at the end of Annex 1.

# Annex 1 – Reporting format for identifying needs for farmer support

The questions and level of detail provided for each category are guidance only. You may wish to add others, or leave some out as appropriate for your situation.

Useful information to gather	Findings and observations of baseline assessment <i>(report on baseline information readily available to the AG)</i>	Smallholder support needs identified <i>(data gathered through consultations)</i>	Significance of the support need/ Prioritisation	Justification
<i>The following are examples of questions that can be used to assess needs that may exist for each of the defined support areas</i>	<i>Report and describe baseline situation</i>	<i>Describe the needs identified. If some support is already provided, describe if and how to get access to it, who is providing it and what the gaps are</i>	<i>Score as high, medium and low</i>	<i>Explain why selected as priority</i>
<b>Support area: Better Yields and Food Security</b>				
<p>Improving Yields</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a potential or request to improve yields?</li> <li>• If so, what are the farming practices that could be contributing to low yields? For example, choice of planting material (seed quality), age of plants, harvesting practices?</li> <li>• What is the age of the farmer plantations? Is there a need for replanting?</li> <li>• Are some smallholders particularly vulnerable or poorly located in terms of low yields?</li> <li>• Is there a difference in yields, age of planting material, harvesting practices between farmers in the supply base?</li> </ul>				

**Support area: Better Yields and Food Security**

Improve Farm Management

- Look into what are considered good farm management practices. Discuss with farmers whether they are aware of these and if they are applied.
- Are there any specific needs for support related to issues, such as tillage (when and how a farmer ploughs his field), planting depth (how deep to plant the seed), or planting population (how many plants in a row to plant and how far apart to plant them)?

Food Security

- Are smallholders able to grow food crops, perhaps as a secondary crop or by intercropping?
- Do smallholders have access to and the means to have a balanced diet?

**Support area: Improved Livelihoods and Institutions**

<p>Organisation of smallholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do smallholders collaborate or operate as a group for certain areas? If so, why?</li> <li>• Are there any (other) specific areas where smallholders would benefit from collaborating or working as a group?</li> <li>• Are there any issues or problems for smallholders to collaborating or being part of a group?</li> <li>• Is any support already being provided for smallholders to collaborate/work as a group?</li> </ul>				
<p>Access to finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do smallholders find it difficult to get access to credit/finance? If so, to what are their problems related?</li> <li>• Is there any existing system or financing structure in place for smallholders? If so, what are some of the problems reported?</li> <li>• Do smallholders have knowledge about the potential sources of finance, who can provide and requirements clear and feasible to meet?</li> </ul>				
<p>Access to Training and Capacity Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there areas where smallholders require more information, training or capacity? If so, for which areas? Any variation across the supply base in terms of training needs?</li> <li>• Are services and access to training already offered? Is it accessible/or feasible for smallholders to participate?</li> <li>• If training is offered, does it address the specific needs of smallholder livelihoods?</li> </ul>				

Support area: Improved Livelihoods and Institutions				
<p>Equality of Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there differences in access to land, finance, inputs, machinery and/or other farmer support services that may be linked to gender, ethnicity or social group?</li> <li>• Are there differences in access to employment and working conditions on smallholder farms for women, ethnic groups, migrant workers or other groups?</li> <li>• Did interviewees (both men and women) suggest that everyone in the community has equal representation, participation and say in farmer groups? Or are there any requests for support in this area?</li> </ul>				
<p>Business Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do smallholders face any problems in planning their production or business?</li> <li>• Are there any issues related to record keeping, or documentation?</li> <li>• Would farmers benefit from any form of business or production planning? If so, which areas and at what level (e.g. farm level, group level)?</li> <li>• Is any support on production and business planning already provided and if not, what organisations could provide assistance?</li> </ul>				

**Support Area: Better Agricultural Practices**

<p>Product quality control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any significant issues related to the quality of the farmer products?</li> <li>• What are key things that could help improve the product quality?</li> <li>• Are there any significant losses between harvest and processing of the farmer products? (E.g. losses during handling, processing, storing, transport, logistics)</li> </ul>				
<p>Soil &amp; water management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do farmers face any problems related to soil quality or management?</li> <li>• Do smallholders face any issues with access to water, water storage or water pollution?</li> <li>• What can be done to improve soil or water management?</li> </ul>				
<p>Pest and weed management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do farmers have any significant issues related to pest and weed management, or the use of agro-chemicals?</li> <li>• Are farmers aware of best practices for pest and weed management?</li> <li>• Would smallholders benefit from any support, and if so, in which areas?</li> <li>• Is any support already being provided and if not, which organisations could help?</li> </ul>				

Others needs/areas of support				
<i>Overview of smallholder needs prioritised</i>	<i>Area in the supply base</i>	<i>Target groups/smallholders identified</i>		