

WHO KNOWS WHOM, WHO DO PEOPLE TRUST, AND WHY IT MATTERS:

A PLAYBOOK FOR MAPPING
COMMUNITY NETWORKS



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO UNCOVERING HOW INFORMATION, TRUST, AND INFLUENCE MOVE THROUGH COMMUNITIES

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Who knows whom do people trust, and why it matters: A
playbook for mapping community networks

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GLOSSARY

1. **Social network map (SNM)**

A visual representation of the relationships between people, groups, or organizations in a community or system.

2. **Information ecosystem map**

A visual that shows how information moves in a community: who gets messages, from which sources (like leaders, radio, friends), and who passes them on or misses out.

3. **Actors**

Any person, group, or organization in the situation you are studying. For example: government officials, community leaders, media, friends, family, youth groups.

4. **Channels**

The means through which information, money, or support moves. For example: radio, TV, social media, community meetings, friends, family, local leaders.

5. **Trusted community members**

People in the community that others listen to, respect, or turn to for advice or help. These can include religious leaders, teachers, local leaders, or respected elders.

6. Civil society organizations (CSOs)

Non-government groups that work for public good, such as voter education, human rights, health, or community development. They are often called NGOs (Non Government Organizations) or non-profits.

7. Community based organizations (CBOs)

Locally led groups that are formed by and within a specific community, often to solve local problems or support each other. They may focus on health, education, savings, or other local issues.

8. Practitioners

People who do practical work in the field, such as designing and running programmes, campaigns, or projects. In this playbook, practitioners include staff of CSOs, CBOs, and other development workers.

9. Participatory process

A way of working where community members are actively involved in decisions, discussions, and activities. They help create the map, share their views, and shape solutions.

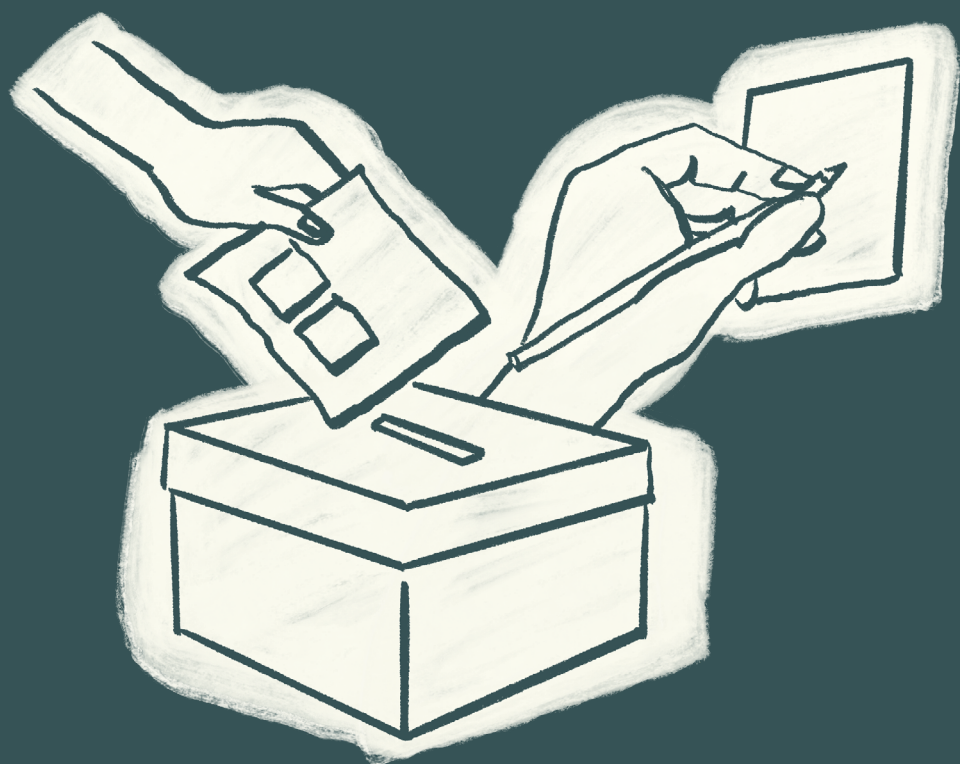
INTRODUCTION

Ahead of local elections, a CSO ran a voter education campaign using radio announcements and posters from electoral officials, assuming these would motivate citizens to vote. However, voter turnout intentions remained low. Further investigation showed that many citizens relied on discussions with family members, religious leaders, friends and community groups to form opinions about elections - with young first-time voters often left out of the loop.

The CSO then changed their intervention, worked directly with these trusted community members and youth leaders, included a targeted channel for young first time voters, leading to faster flow of information, trust, and stronger intentions to participate in the election.

This playbook is designed to help people find out how information travels, which people have most influence, and how inter-personal relationships affect decisions, in a community. It's most useful for civil society organizations, community-based organizations and practitioners who want to design interventions that leverage community relationships. It offers a simple way of visually mapping out how information and support flows in a community. It can be implemented easily, at a low cost, and without the need of technical expertise.

Knowing the real social dynamics at play in a community, enables practitioners to design interventions that are more inclusive of people left out of information and resource loops.



WHAT IS SOCIAL NETWORK MAPPING?

Social network mapping is **a research method that visually illustrates the relationships and connections that form a societal structure.**

It shows clearly which individuals, groups, and even institutions are connected to each other.

These maps can be adapted to different contexts to figure out collaboration dynamics, potential disease transmissions, how information flows, and who influences behavior change.

With this playbook, we will be using a social network map to understand, in a particular community, who talks to whom, who shares support, and who influences local decisions.



WHAT TO USE SOCIAL NETWORK MAPPING FOR?

Design communication campaigns

Encourage community participation

Reach groups that are usually left out



WHEN TO USE SOCIAL NETWORK MAPPING?



You want to design a communication campaign, mobilize people or resources.



You want to understand how messages spread, who people seek for help and advice, and who connects different groups.



You want to know who are the informal leaders, the silent power brokers, and who is isolated.



You want to spot opportunities for coordination and collaboration in your own network.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK?

This playbook is a practical, step-by-step guide that can be adapted to different community contexts and program goals. It uses a participatory process to help practitioners understand how relationships, trust, and influence shape behavior and decision-making in communities.

You can apply it before, during, or after an intervention.



AT THE START:

Helps identify trusted influencers, excluded groups, and information pathways to design more effective engagement.

DURING IMPLEMENTATION:

Reveals gaps in communication, coordination, or inclusion.

AFTER AN INTERVENTION:

Tracks whether connections, trust, or participation patterns have changed over time.

OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL NETWORKING APPROACH

CLARIFY PURPOSE
AND SCOPE

PREPARE TOOLS
AND LOGISTICS

IDENTIFY
THE ACTORS

DRAW THE
CONNECTIONS

LOOK FOR PATTERNS
AND VALIDATE

REFLECT AND ACT

STEP ONE:

CLARIFY PURPOSE AND SCOPE.

Decide exactly what you want to learn e.g., communication flow, influence, referral pathways, collaborators, etc.

Define the population and geographic area you will map , i.e. who is included in the map (whole community, youth, service providers,etc).

Example:

A CSO wants to understand why youth are not participating in community meetings. They decide the SNM will focus on: How information about meetings spreads, who influences youth decisions and which groups youth trust or avoid. This keeps the mapping focused on youth and information flow, not the entire community structure.

STEP TWO:

PREPARE TOOLS AND LOGISTICS.

1. Participants:

20-30 community members representing people from different parts of the community such as women, men, youth, elders, people with disabilities, local leaders, and groups who are often overlooked.

2. Facilitators:

2-3 people trained in participatory methods, ideally from within the community.

3. Observers/note-takers:

1-2 people to record insights and take photos (if consented).

4. Materials:

Such as large paper/flipcharts, markers, sticky notes, pens, printed node cards (people/groups), string or yarn for connections and if you'll digitize later, a tablet or camera to photograph.

STEP THREE:

IDENTIFY THE ACTORS.

Ask participants to list all the relevant individuals, groups, or institutions e.g., leaders, youth groups, social groups, local officials, etc. in their community or area. Use simple prompts as the following to elicit connections.

- **Think of the last time you needed help with (issue). Who did you speak to?**
- **Who influences decisions about this in this community?**
- **Which two people or groups would you ask to help spread a new idea?**
- **Who is left out or hard to reach?**

Write each answer on a sticky note or draw a simple symbol for them. Each individual or group becomes a 'node' on the map.

STEP FOUR:

DRAW THE CONNECTIONS.

Draw lines to connect people and groups.

Use lines or strings to connect nodes who interact, collaborate, or share information. Use colors or line styles for different types of relationships. Examples below:

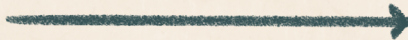
Solid line = frequent contact



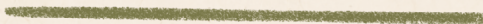
Dotted line = occasional contact



Arrows = information or help flows in one direction



Different color = type of relationship (e.g., trust, financial, social)



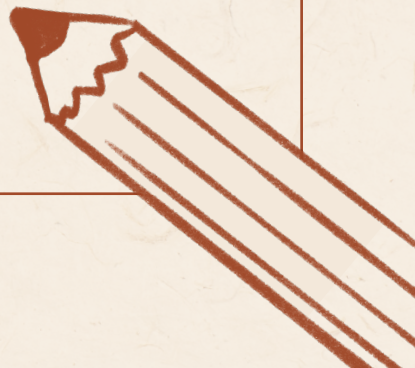
Star = trusted person



Red dot = potential gatekeeper/blocker



Grey = isolated / rarely connected



STEP FIVE:

LOOK FOR PATTERNS AND VALIDATE.

Facilitate a short reflection session and ask participants what stands out on the map. This discussion is the most valuable part as it reveals hidden dynamics.

1. Point out central nodes, isolated people/groups, or clusters in the network. Ask:

- How does information usually flow?
- Who is influential? Who is most connected? Who is nearest to all others in the network, and thus can reach or be reached quickly by others? Who connects separate groups?
- Who is left out? Are women or youth well-connected?
- Are there any surprises?
- Do people connect more with people similar to themselves (age, gender, place of living, education, beliefs etc.)? e.g., Do women connect with other women?

2. Use these observations to validate that the map reflects reality or to surface disagreements, for example, different participants may map the same network differently and both could be informative.



STEP SIX:

REFLECT AND ACT.

Understand what the patterns mean or imply for your objective.

1. Ask participants:

- 
- What does this tell us about how we work together?
 - Who has knowledge or access others lack?
 - Who could help connect isolated groups?
 - What do these connections tell us?
 - How can we strengthen weak links or include excluded people?
 - What actions can we take together?

2. Translate map insights into clear recommendations e.g., engage central connectors to spread messages, target isolated groups with outreach, or strengthen weak ties between organizations.
3. Networks change therefore use a short repeat mapping after interventions to track whether connections, trust, or information flow improved.
4. You could also photograph the maps and transcribe the nodes and how they are connected into simple software and calculate basic metrics if needed (degree centrality, isolates, bridges) or keep it qualitative by sharing the maps back with the community for co-design of interventions.

FOR BEST RESULTS



Define unique naming identifiers to be used as most people can share names or may be called by different names e.g., Agnes could be the same as 'Mama Ben'.

Ensure diverse and representative participation. Include participants from different genders, ages, and social groups, to capture a full picture of the network. Missing perspectives can distort the map.



Maintain confidentiality. Relationships can be sensitive. Be transparent about how data will be used, avoid naming individuals publicly without consent, and anonymize maps if shared outside the group.

Facilitate participatory mapping. Encourage participants to describe relationships honestly. Avoid imposing your assumptions on the network or labeling things as 'important' or 'unimportant.' SNM is most useful when it shows both connections (lines) and attributes (trust, frequency, type of tie). Use symbols, colors, or annotations to capture nuances.



Plan for action and follow-up. Use the insights to inform programming, strengthen collaboration, or empower communities. Repeat mapping over time to track changes and measure impact.



ACTIVITY EXAMPLES

MAPPING THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

STEP ONE:

CLARIFY PURPOSE AND SCOPE.

Scenario:

The national government has issued a public notice inviting residents to attend a public participation forum on the national budget to be held on 15th March 2027, at the county offices. Historically, the turnout has been low, and the government wants to involve you in co-developing a communication strategy to increase your community's participation.

STEP TWO:

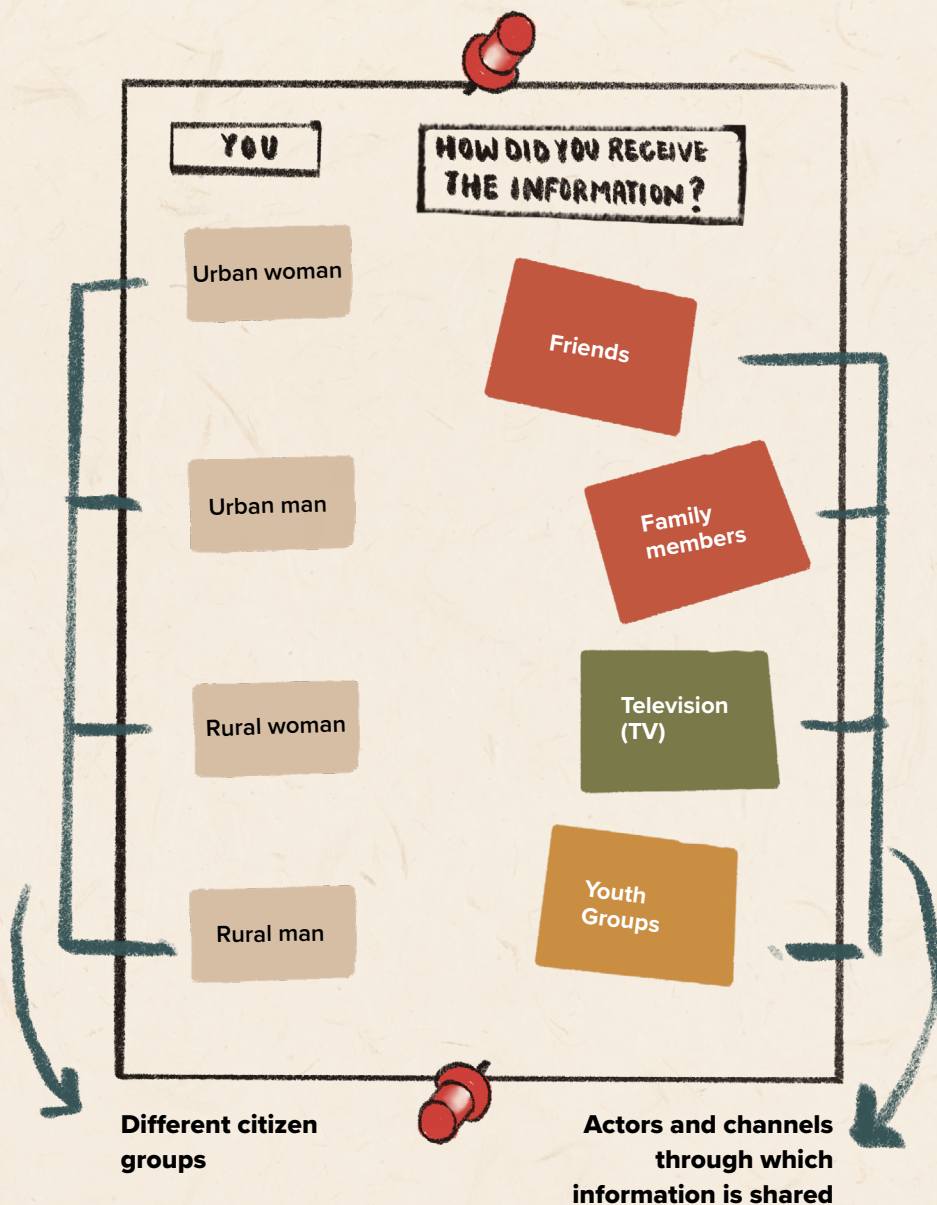
PREPARE TOOLS AND LOGISTICS.

What you will need :



Note to the facilitator:

On the noticeboard, draw the following map:



STEP THREE:

IDENTIFY THE ACTORS.

All participants choose the group they belong to.

Note to the facilitator:

Groups are divided based on age, gender, location for beginning, but can have as many or less details (income, religion, education, county) as required.



Urban woman

18- 35 years

36- 55 years

56 + years



Urban man

18- 35 years

36- 55 years

56 + years



Rural woman

18- 35 years

36- 55 years

56 + years



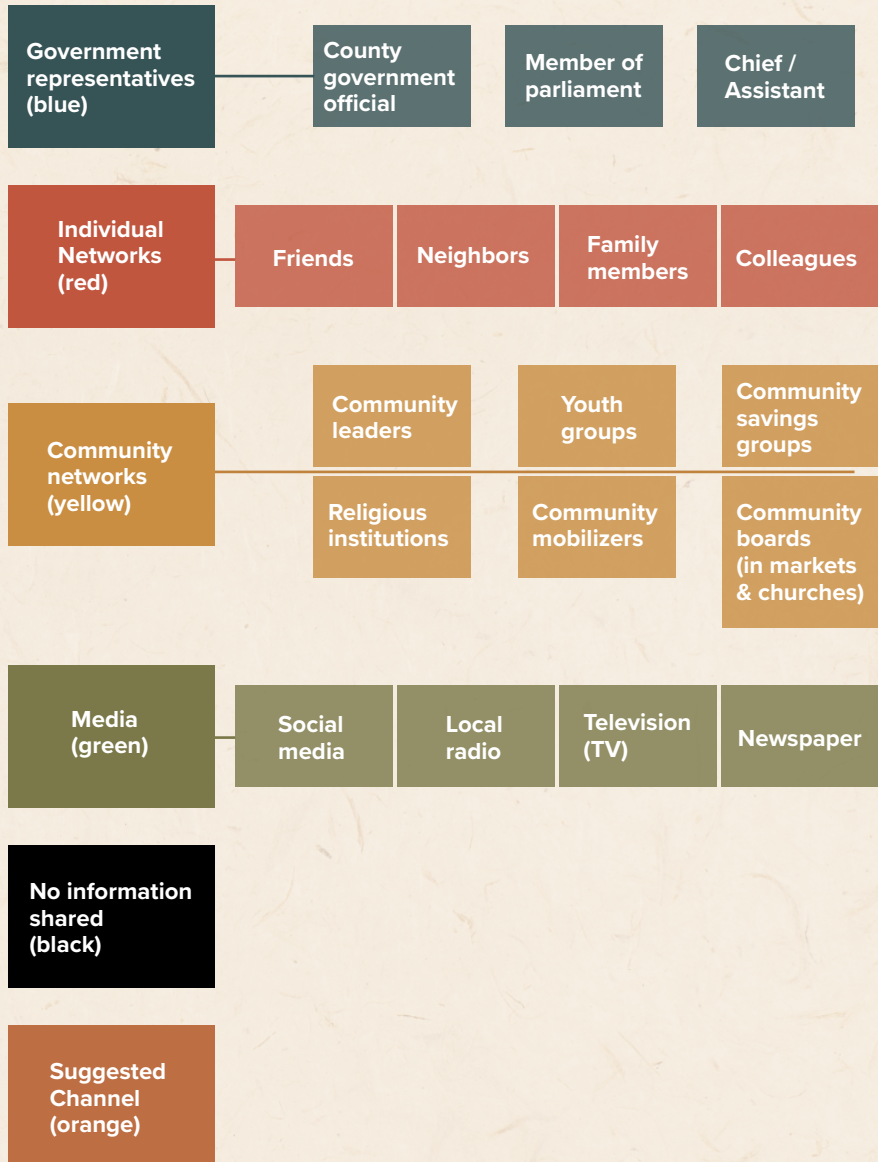
Rural man

18- 35 years

36- 55 years

56 + years

The right side of the map would contain the channels through which information is shared. This would look like (Can be changed to fit to your scenario) :



STEP FOUR:

DRAW THE CONNECTIONS.

Ask all the participants the following questions and ask them to showcase the same on the map.

1. Did you receive this information last year?
2. If yes, who did you receive it from? (If the participant heard this on the TV, then they use a green thread to connect the sticky note that reads 'TV' to the citizen group they are part of).
3. If not, what would be the most convenient and reliable way for you to receive this information? (Participant uses the orange colour thread to connect the citizen group they are part of to the actor/ channel they would like to receive this information from)
4. If yes, who did you further share this information with? (If the participant has told their neighbors, they use a red thread to connect the sticky note that reads 'neighbors' to the citizen group they are part of, (using the outside thumbtack).



YOU

**HOW DID YOU RECEIVE
THE INFORMATION?**

Urban woman

Friends

Urban man

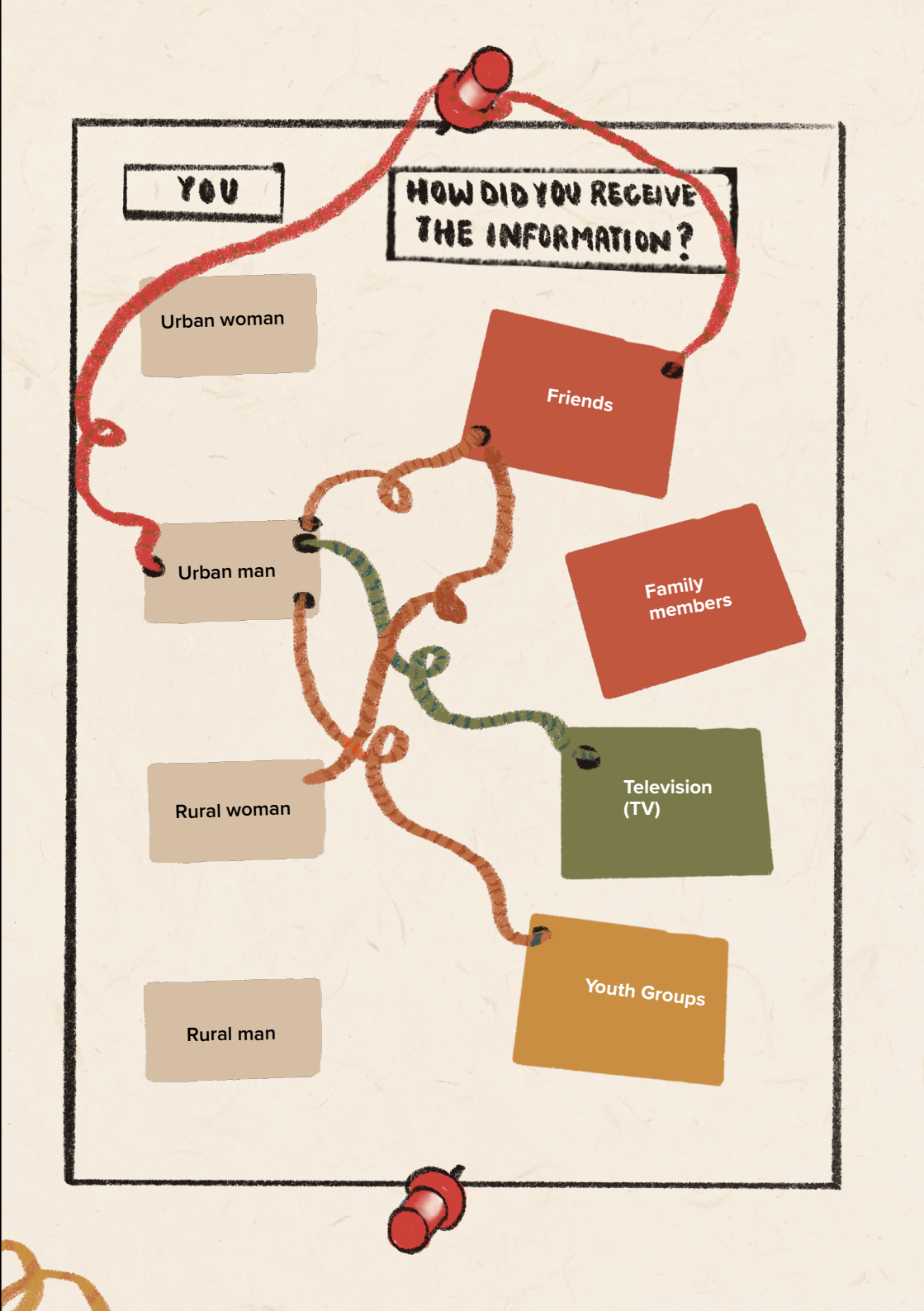
Family
members

Rural woman

Television
(TV)

Rural man

Youth Groups



STEP FIVE:

LOOK FOR PATTERNS AND VALIDATE.

Write the questions asked below on a chart paper, and also ask the participants the questions. Ask them to write their responses on the sticky notes, and stick them under the questions.

1. Which thread color do you see the most?
2. Which thread color do you see the least?
3. Which group has the most connections? (Most Connected)
4. Which group is most connected to No One? (Excluded)
5. Which individual actor(s) has the most connections? (Most Influential)
6. Which individual actor(s) has the least connections? (Least Influential)
7. Can you tell where most people get this kind of information from?
8. If the most influential person was not involved in the communication strategy, what would happen?



Most used thread colour

Least used thread colour

YOU

**HOW DID YOU RECEIVE
THE INFORMATION?**

Urban woman

Friends

Urban man

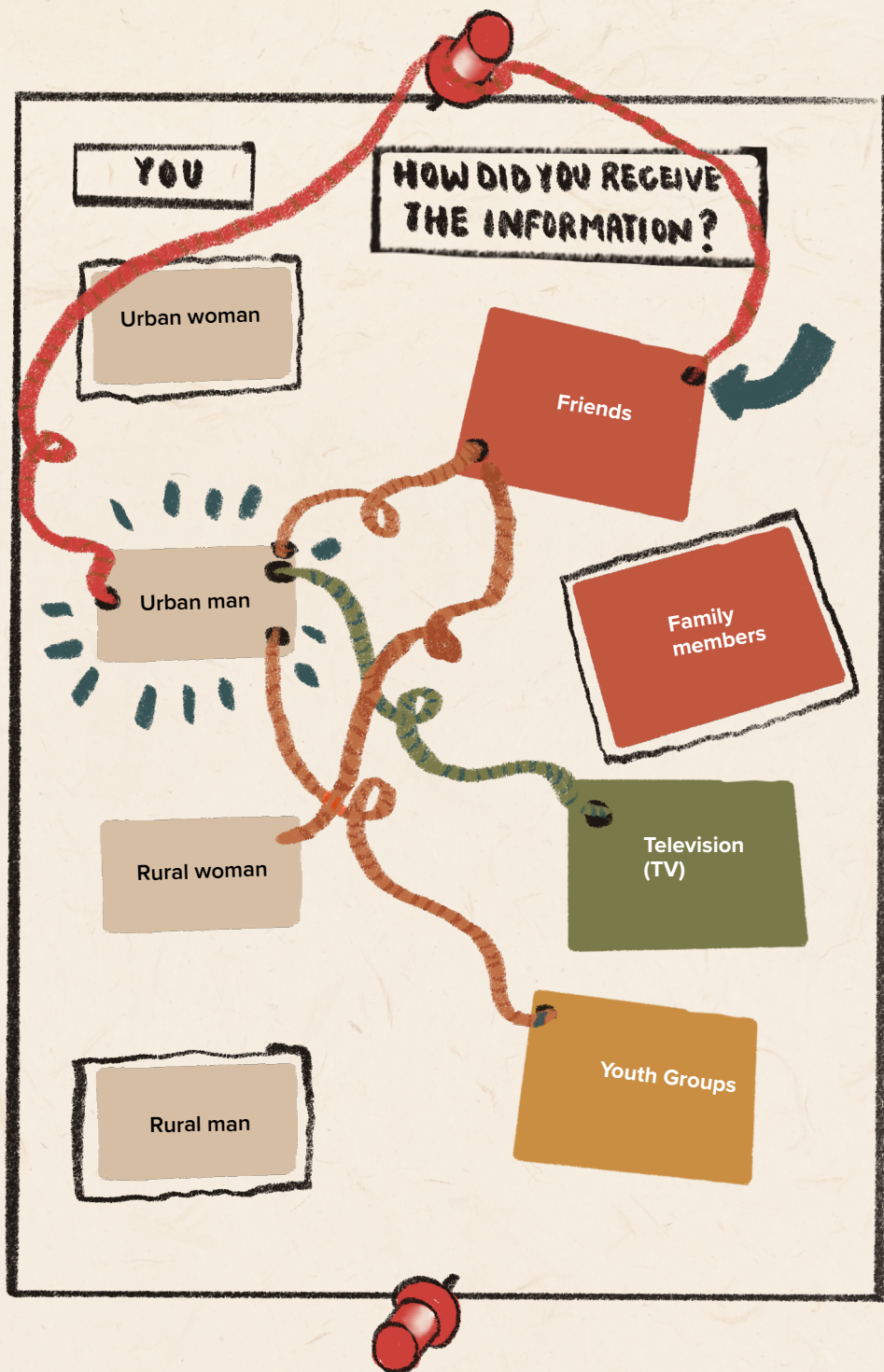
Family
members

Rural woman

Television
(TV)

Rural man

Youth Groups



STEP SIX:

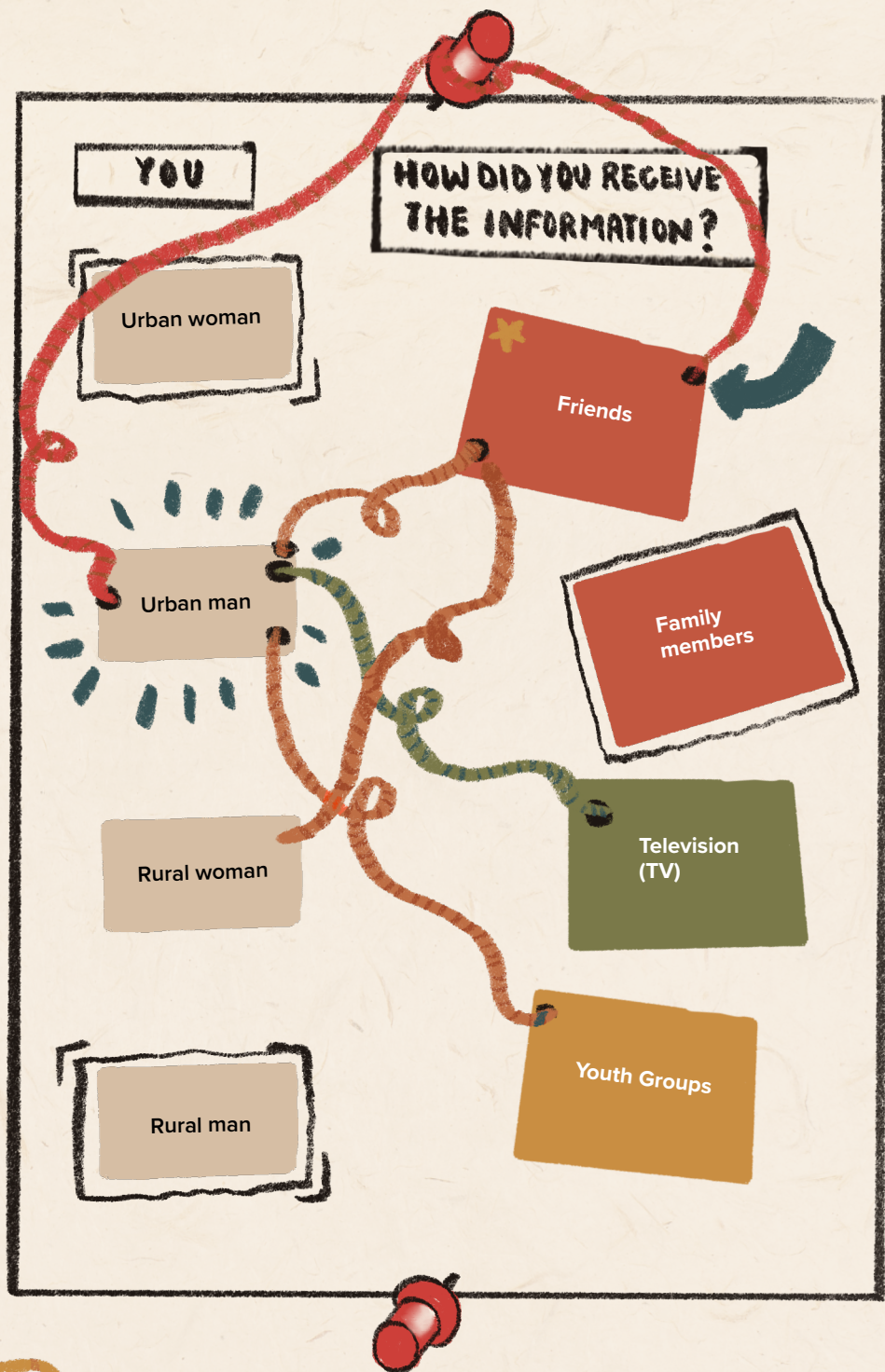
REFLECT AND ACT.

Look at the completed map.

1. Which group has the fewest connections?
(Most likely to be left out)
2. Which group is most likely to miss important information?
3. How can you best reach the group with the fewest connections?
4. Who could help pass information to the group with the fewest connections?
5. Which people or groups are best placed to share information with them?
6. What is the best way to get information to this group?

Translate map insights and suggestions from the participants into clear recommendations .e.g. use social media to reach out to 18-35yr old women in urban areas, or use friends/family/neighbors to reach out to 36-55yr old women in rural areas etc.





HOW TO ADAPT THIS ACTIVITY TO DIFFERENT SCENARIOS

You can also use this activity, by altering the questions asked to participants to find out about the way money flows in a community, who inspires participation, and who holds influence (to name a few). Here are some questions you can ask participants if you want to adapt it to different scenarios.

SCENARIO 1:

MAPPING THE FLOW OF FINANCES

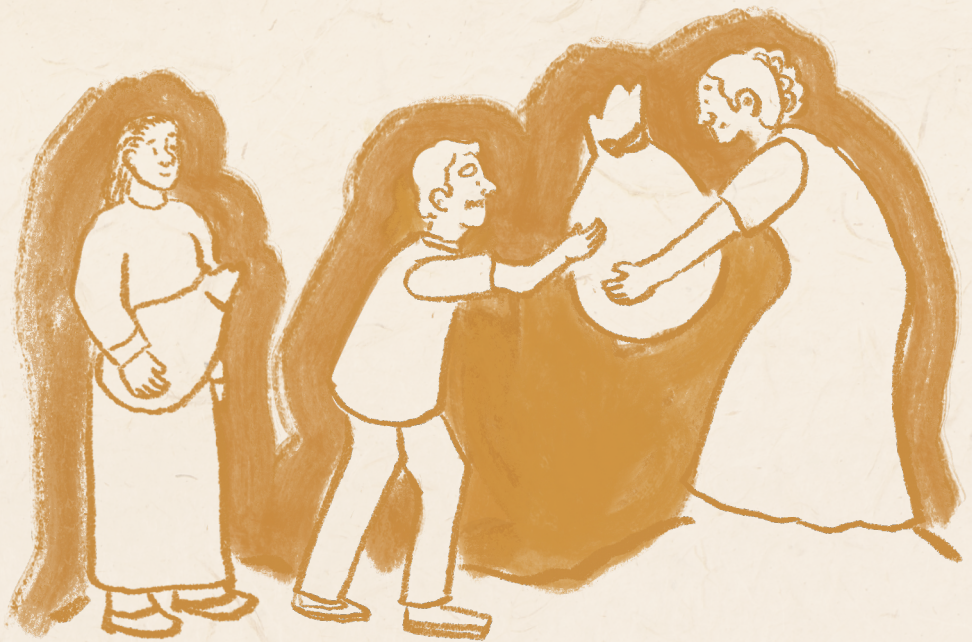
Use this when:

You want to find out who in a community helps in accessing funding.

Example:

The government and development partners have introduced a small grants program to support community-led projects (e.g., youth employment, women's businesses, local infrastructure). Applications are open, but very few people from your community applied last year, and most funds went to a small group of individuals or organizations. You want to understand what it takes for more people to access this.





Actors

Funding beneficiaries

The participants would be asked:

1. Who informed you about the funding opportunity?
2. Who helped you apply (got you application documents, translated them, and so on)?
3. Did you receive the funding?
4. Who did you receive it from?

What this will help you uncover:

- **Who usually gets left out and why?**
- **Who is reached out to, for help with accessing funding?**
- **What makes it difficult to apply for funding?**
- **Is there a skill gap, hard to understand documentation, not well connected enough?**
- **Who are the gatekeepers?**
- **What role do intermediaries such as NGOs and community leaders play?**
- **How is trust and fairness perceived in the funding landscape?**

SCENARIO 2:

MAPPING HOW PEOPLE ARE INSPIRED TO PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITIES

Use this when:

You want to find out who and what makes people participate in civic activities.

Example:

A community clean-up has been planned in your area. In the past, turnout has been inconsistent. Some groups show up in large numbers, while others do not participate at all.



Participant groups:

Urban woman of 18- 35 years, urban man of 18-35 years, and so on

Mobilization actors:

Friends, leaders, neighbors, CSO representatives

The participants would be asked:

- **Did you attend the clean-up in the recent past?**
If yes, who convinced you to attend the clean-up?
- **Who coordinated the logistics of attending the event, such as arranging transportation, figuring out meeting points, communicating timings?**
- **Did you bring anyone else along with you?**

What this will help you uncover:

- Who inspires people to participate?
- Which groups are hardest to mobilize?
- What are the informal mobilization networks that are in play, such as religious leaders, youth groups?
- What are the weak links between organizers and certain groups?

SCENARIO 3:

MAPPING WHO INFLUENCES BEHAVIOR IN A COMMUNITY

Use this when:

You want to find out how social roles and expectations shape participation.



Participant groups:

Urban woman of 18- 35 years, urban man of 18-35 years, and so on

Norm influencers:

Women, men, families, institutions

The participants would be asked:

- **Who sets expectations about roles in the community such as, ‘women shouldn’t speak’?**
- **Whose opinion matters most when you decide to attend or speak in a community meeting?**
- **Who breaks or challenges these expectations?**

What this will help you uncover:

- **Are there people who would encourage / discourage participation?**
- **Who is allowed to speak freely and who is not?**
- **What are the consequences of challenging expectations?**
- **What are the gender norms and power dynamics that are in play here?**
- **What are the invisible barriers such as fear, stigma, social approval, that are at play here?**
- **How do families, communities and institutions influence behavior?**
- **Who enforces norms and who challenges them?**



Busara is a research and advisory organization, working with researchers and organizations to advance and apply behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation. Busara pursues a future where global human development activities respond to people's lived experience; value knowledge generated in the context it is applied; and promote culturally appropriate and inclusive practices.

To accomplish this, we practice and promote behavioral science in ways that center and value the perspectives of respondents; expand the practice of research where it is applied; and build networks, processes, and tools that increase the competence of practitioners and researchers.

