**Community Needs Assessment – An Outline of the Process**

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**Why Do Community Needs Assessment?**

Assessing a community’s needs will provide an understanding of the community. Community needs assessments gather and assess data about community strengths and gaps. This understanding of both needs and strengths can be used to plan and provide appropriate, effective, and well-timed interventions, programs, and services. Information gained can be used to improve and promote the health of all residents. Community assessment can also bring communities together to creatively address difficult issues and give voice to the members.

**Why Do a Community Assessment in Teso?**

Various sources from Eastern Uganda have anecdotally identified a growing abuse of drugs and alcohol in Teso. The step between anecdotal accounts and program development and implementation is data collection, assessment, and evaluation. Qualitative and quantitative data will provide direction for culturally appropriate program development as well as the foundation for seeking funding for those programs.

The steps involved in a Community Needs Assessment are:

1. Commitment: Assemble a team or coalition of community members to address key issues and establish partnerships with other agencies.
2. Plan and conduct the community needs assessment
   1. Community team: Define purpose. Identify and assemble a diverse community team, 10-12, eg.:
      1. Law enforcer
      2. Faith leader
      3. Hospital administrator
      4. Community health worker
      5. School principal or headmaster
      6. Neighborhood council representative
      7. Civic leader
      8. Local advocates
      9. Local business leader
      10. Local health practitioner
   2. Develop a team strategy
      1. Define goals for the needs assessment
      2. Define how the data will be used (For example: influence policy makers, support new programs, support changes in service delivery or polices, etc.)
      3. Set timeline for the assessment
      4. Determine roles and responsibilities of team members
      5. Assign tasks based on skills and available resources
      6. Identify how decisions will be made
      7. Tool for conducting the assessment
   3. Identify the scope of the assessment
      1. Define community to assess (boundaries) (region or neighborhood)
         1. Environment survey
         2. Cultural/lifestyle context
         3. Historical perspective
      2. Identify community sectors to assess (health, livelihood, family, cultural impact)
         1. Community-at-Large Sector includes community-wide efforts that impact the social and built environments, such as food access, personal safety.
         2. Community Institution/Organization (CIO) Sector includes entities within the community that provide a broad range of human services and access to facilities, such as childcare, faith-based organizations, senior centers, health facilities, colleges, universities.
         3. Health Care Sector includes clinics, hospitals, private doctors’ offices, community clinics or health posts, traditional healers.
         4. Work Site Sector includes places of employment such as agriculture, manufacturing, private offices, restaurants, retail establishments, and government offices.
         5. School Sector includes all primary and secondary learning institutions.
      3. Identify community components to assess (drug and alcohol use)
         1. Choose components withing each sector that the team believes are the most important and relevant to evaluate and that will lead to the most useful recommendations for improvement.
         2. Examples: demographics – statistical data of a population such as age, income, education level, type of work site/health facility/school. Choose what is important.
         3. Assess if each sector has policies and systems in place to evaluate risk and to help people in that system to engage in health promoting behavior. This may include identifying leadership.
   4. Qualitative Data Collection (Primary Data)
      1. Develop questions to ask for each community component, as well as response options for quantitative questions.
      2. Select sites and number of sites to visit within each sector. Systematically choose variety of sites and document the process for choosing those sites.
      3. Determine existing data to use or methods for collecting new data to reflect the voice of the community.
         1. Direct observation, photographs (keep safety in mind)
         2. Key informant (people who have a particular expertise in the community) interviews
         3. Primary informant (randomly encountered people) interviews
         4. Focus groups
      4. Identify key informants to interview
         1. Interviewers must be trained to conduct interviews, focus groups, etc., the same.
         2. Keep quotes, not summary of interviews in notes
      5. Documentation
         1. Comprehensive files of all sources of information, key contact, and data to review a t later date.
         2. Form can be notebooks, bound, field notes, meeting minutes, electronic data file.
         3. Assures that all data collected can be accessed and used.
   5. Quantitative Data Collection (Secondary Data)
      1. Vital statistics
      2. Hospital records
      3. Census
      4. Police
      5. Schools
      6. Churches
      7. Other sources
      8. Socioeconomic Factors – income levels, unemployment rates, percent of people living on the street, education, etc.
      9. Environmental factors – indoor and outdoor environment as well as the “built” or structural environment. Air, water quality, safety and sanitation of food, lodging, child and elder care facilities, lead, tobacco usage, safe walking
      10. Health indicators:
          1. Pregnancies and births
          2. Mortality
          3. Morbidity
          4. General health status
   6. Conduct the assessment
   7. Compile, review, analyze, and rate/interpret the data
      1. For each data collection site, make note of what type of data was collected, where it came from and any pertinent details. Keep in comprehensive data file.
      2. Decision-making strategy in place, eg., Delphi (first vote is secret until consensus; simple voting, discussion.
      3. One person identified to manage data.
      4. Summarize data.
      5. Create the Community Needs Assessment Document and review with stakeholders
3. Develop community action plan
   1. Identify assets and needs.
   2. Develop and prioritize strategies, incorporating strengths
   3. Funding sources
   4. Implementation
4. Implement action plan
   1. Collaborate with stakeholders, assessment team, and partners.
   2. Maintain commitment and ownership established in the beginning.
   3. Plan for each priority strategy.
   4. Key milestone markers and time line.
5. Evaluation
   1. Define criteria for success
   2. Establish how to measure impact
   3. Gathers lessons from what is being implemented and provides recommendations for what can be done in the future.
   4. Useful for key decision makers.
   5. Should be included throughout all phases.

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