



Participation of Communities, Stakeholders and Users

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In this chapter

- **What is a community?**

- **Understanding communities and their needs**

- **What role can the CMC play in dealing with community issues?**

- **Community participation in the CMC**

- **Working with others**



Participation of Communities, Stakeholders and Users

What is a community?

'Community' is a concept, which is not always easy to define. Unless reference is made to a specific, known community, its use can be quite vague. At the same time it is central to development and social justice work. 'Community' adds a human dimension. When discussing 'community development' and 'community empowerment' keep in mind that the goal is to benefit actual people by improving access to resources and increasing participation in decisions that impact day-to-day lives.

In general 'a community' refers to a group of people who are bound together in some way – by living in close proximity to one another, sharing or having common needs, interests, life experiences, cultural or religious characteristics, common values or common activities.

It is useful to think of community along with the words 'common' and 'commune'.

- 'Common' points to the **characteristics that people in the community have in common** and that define the group as a community.
- 'Commune' highlights the element of **communication** and interaction that shapes and sustains communities.

Mapping your community to understand its composition is discussed in the Starting Up Chapter. Here we shall use the same approach to identify community information needs.

As a starting point, Example 1 below demonstrates types of communities and the common characteristics that draw a group of people into a 'community'. As a short exercise, fill in the right-hand column with what you think would be the information needs of each of these communities.

Example 1

Members of the community	Type of community	Common characteristics	Information needs
residents of a village or neighbourhood	geographic/ residential	location and local conditions, local government, leaders, service providers	
community radio broadcasters in Zambia	professional/ activity	similar work experience, skills, regulatory environment	
child victims of sexual abuse	support group	similar experiences of trauma and recovery	
catholic relief workers	religious/activity	faith, religious values, and work experience	
people living with HIV/AIDS	support group activist group advocacy group	experience, advocacy goals, needs for medication and health services etc.	



Make the most of overlapping community members



For example, in the context of a CMC, a woman farmer who has a disability could be an active member of the women farmer community as well as the community of people with disabilities. If your CMC reaches out successfully to women farmers, you could work with this particular woman to develop relationship with people living with disabilities in your area.

Users and stakeholders

In the case of a CMC your users and stakeholders will be part of your target community. 'Users' generally refers to people who make use of the CMC services, and 'stakeholders' are those people or groups of people who have a 'stake' or interest in the CMC, its purpose and services. Sometimes you might have users from outside your target community e.g., other CMCs or organisations based in other regions. Stakeholders are more than 'users'. They need to be included in the process that leads toward the establishment of a CMC, defining its strategic direction and giving feedback on its impact.

In this chapter stakeholders are not dealt with separately as we assume that your target community or communities are your CMC's users as well as your key stakeholders.

Define the users and stakeholders to be included in the starting up process by discussing with your CMC staff, volunteers, partners or donors the types of communities, sub-communities, and interest groups you want to reach in priority order; the 'stakes' or interests of these groupings, and identify the community you and your team belong to.

What community do you want to reach?

Whom do you aim to serve? People in a particular neighbourhood, a province or region? Or does your CMC want to work with a particular thematic community, for example, women involved in a micro-credit scheme, or cotton farmers?

You will need a clear vision of whom you want to reach in order to:

- plan your CMC's activities and services
- choose a location for the CMC
- apply for a grant or loan
- sell advertising space, if you have a newsletter or a radio station in your CMC

Your vision will also influence how you choose CMC workers, what language or languages you operate in, and what material you collect and provide.

Is there more than one distinct community?

Sometimes you might want to reach more than one community. For example, a CMC in a residential area on the outskirts of Johannesburg in South Africa might want to reach the people who have been living there for the last decade as well as a new community of migrant workers from Mozambique who live in informal settlements on the outskirts of the neighbourhood.

These two communities are different, speak different languages, and have information needs that might overlap in some areas, but be very different in other areas. For example, the migrant workers would need to know about the rights of both legal and illegal immigrants.

Women's access and participation in your CMC

It is often a mistaken assumption that information technology is gender neutral. This notion has often resulted in the exclusion of women and girls. Women are interested in using information communication technologies and community radio and it is essential that CMCs address women's concerns and needs by providing an enabling environment for women's participation at all levels.

Many community radio stations and telecentres often do not take into consideration the cultural, traditional, social, economic and time constraints that women in their community face and, therefore, they fail in reaching out to the women and girls.

Nancy J. Hafkin and Sonia Jorge describe some preconditions for women's full participation. Key to your approach is to involve gender-aware persons from the beginning of your project design rather than on hindsight or during your mid-term review.

Janice Brodman outlines the following requirements to ensure that women have access to information and communication technologies:

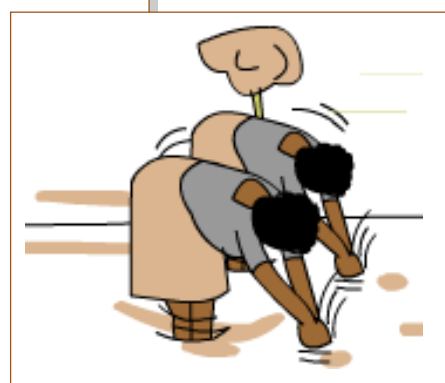
- **Conduct an active outreach:** Many outreach methods such as leaflets or meetings do not easily reach women because of illiteracy and no time to attend meetings. In the family, the men generally frequent public places and take upon themselves the duty of public activities.
- **Ensure financial accessibility:** As women are often responsible for the household needs of the family, they will first buy food and other essential goods before they can spend on Internet access.
- **Ensure physical accessibility:** If the CMC is in a remote place it might be hard for women to come home from the centre at night or it might be in a place where women traditionally do not go on their own.
- **Provide training:** Training needs for women and men might be different; while women need training in computer use, most men need training in customer services. Because of disparate language (knowledge of English) and literacy levels, different training modules might be necessary.
- **Ensure relevance:** Because women have tight schedules and large workloads they need to be convinced of the relevance of CMC activities. They need to see immediate and useful results emanating from their participation.
- **Build confidence:** As young girls, women have been told that there are a number of activities, especially technical and community work, that are not for them. They are therefore inclined to focus their skills on other fields. We need to build their confidence in performing successfully and they will enjoy it.
- **Enable participation:** It is easy to say women are invited to participate but when they come, they are intimidated to find they have to fulfil a number of preconditions or there is no airtime, no computer available etc.

In order to avoid all the common obstacles, we have to engender our CMC from the very first stage of planning. 'Engender' does not only mean to raise women's consciousness, but also to raise men's consciousness so that they support women's participation by taking more responsibility in the household, on the farm etc. Women of the community carry a huge potential in contributing to the success of the CMC and the community; it is our responsibility to unfold this potential.

Bianca Miglioretto

Further information on the topic

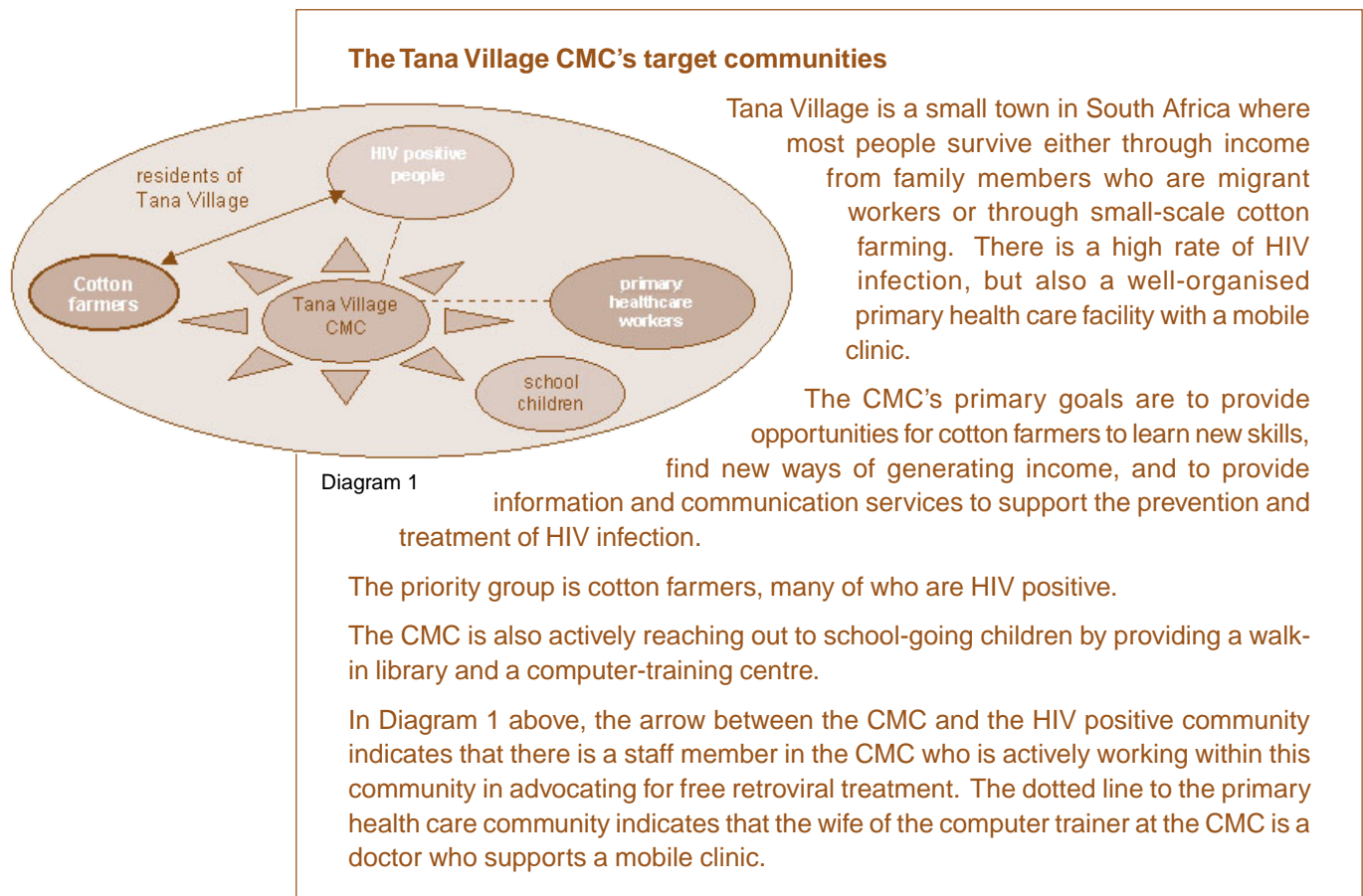
- "Women and Communication", Women in Action 2/2002 by Isis International Manila. <http://www.isiswomen.org>
- Sonja Jorge, Gender Perspectives on Telecenters, ITU-Telecom Americas 2000 and "Gender-Sensitive ICT Projects: A Policy Framework", prepared for Gender Evaluation methodology Workshop, APC-WNSP, May 2002
- GEM – Gender Evaluation Methodology: Learning for Change, The APC WNSP Evaluation Model: <http://www.apcwomen.org/gem/learning4change/>





Does this community contain smaller ‘sub-communities’ or stakeholder groups?

Once you have identified the main community that you want to reach, it is helpful to consider if it contains smaller sub-communities or specific stakeholder groups that you need to consult and consider. For example, if the residents of a large rural village are your primary community, you might find that within this community there are religious groups that are quite distinct within the larger community.



Why it is important to understand the communities you work with?

There are many reasons including:

- the community or communities you work with form the CMC’s ‘market’, i.e. target users, audience, users, and listeners. Understanding who they are and what their needs are is the only way in which you will be able to provide meaningful content and services. Some people call this process ‘**market definition and analysis**’.
- the legitimacy and long term sustainability of the CMC depends on community involvement, support, ownership and relevance of CMC services to their needs. You could think of this as ‘**community participation and ownership**’.
- *strengthening the community* is likely to form part of your core goal — capacity building, provision of resources and support, facilitating public participation in local or national



government processes, or providing a space for meetings and experience sharing. All of these contribute to **'community empowerment and development'**.

Analysing needs, concerns and relationships in your locality

There are many ways of understanding community needs and dynamics better such as doing some background reading and gathering your own information.

Background reading

Learn about your community's history and current social and economic situation by asking some of the sample questions listed below. Some of the answers will depend on how much has been documented about the community. Remember that knowledge largely lies with the people form of memory and stories.

Questions about the community's history

- How long has the community been in existence?
- Were there specific reasons for the formation of the community? What were these reasons?
- How does the history of this community fit into the history of the country or region as a whole?
- How has the community changed over time?

Questions about social, cultural and economic factors

- What are the main sources of income?
- What is the social structure, ethnic makeup, language, and religious practice?
- Are there specific conflicts in the community, e.g. among different religious groups, or over land allocation, or trading rights?
- What do people do for recreation and how do they express themselves culturally? What is the status of women, children, elderly people, people with disabilities in the community?

Try tapping the following sources of information:

- National census statistics, which should be available from your government's statistics department.
- Local government officials
- Elders with a reputable memory and a reputation for reciting stories

Questions about how the community is organised

- Is the community formally organised, with some form of leadership or accountability structure?
- How are leaders selected or identified? By age, religious status, inheritance, elections, rotation?
- What areas does the leadership have control over? Allocation of land, negotiating with local government, providing services etc.

Anticipate change

As you continue with the work of the CMC it is necessary to revisit your initial analysis of these communities and their needs. You should also assess whether there are new communities emerging.

For example, a drought, or conflict situation could cause a new group of people to migrate into your neighbourhood with new and diverse language and information needs, or your existing user communities might change due to certain influences, e.g., workers becoming redundant due to the closure of a factory may also cause an increase in the number of people working as informal street traders in your community.



The questions are useful for tracing changes that took place over a period of time in the community. Draw a chronological timeline for the community to help map some of these changes.

Example

Timeline for Seavale Informal Settlement

(An imaginary community in Durban, South Africa)

- 1980 – First families arrive after forced removal from Lamontville
- 1982 – Formation of the Seavale Community Action Committee
- 1986 – Arrest of the Seavale Six and death in detention of Mathew Mpungose
- 1987 – Seavale community centre (called after Mathew Mpungose) is built with funding from Scandinavian churches
- 1987 – Population of Seavale triples in size as a result of new people moving into the area after lifting of influx control legislation in South Africa
- 1992 – Seavale Women Action is formed and establish small business support network for trader and sowing groups
- 1994 – New post-apartheid government comes to power in South Africa
- 1995 – Large taxi rank built in Seavale and the beginning of taxi violence
- 1997 – Seavale Community Action is resurrected and submits a land claim for the land from which the original community was removed in 1980
- 2000 – First awareness that many people are dying from AIDS and AIDS/HIV NGOs begin to work in Seavale.
- 2001 – Government starts a housing development scheme in Seavale, 10,000 houses are built in 2 years.
- 2002 – Influx of a group of illegal immigrants from Mozambique
- 2003 – Vusi Musa, a soccer player born in Seavale, is selected for the national team, Bafana Bafana, and scores a winning goal in a match against Senegal. Residents celebrate in the street outside his mother's home.

... and so on.

Exercise

It is 2004 and you are part of a team that is setting up a CMC in Seavale. Looking at the above timeline, what information do you think would be particularly important for you to consider in your planning?

Gathering your own information

This can be done by:

- mapping resources and initiatives in the locality, e.g. newspapers, radio stations, organisations, businesses, self-help groups
- attending meetings and events
- talking to people who work in the community, for example other organisations or service providers
- speaking to members of the community or communities directly, formally and informally.



Attending meetings and events

Find out what is happening by attending meetings and events and make sure that someone from your CMC attends. You could learn about issues that are important to your community by attending local government meetings e.g., with street traders. The work of the CMC is very similar to the work of journalists.

Talking to people who work in the community

Through the mapping exercise you will have identified organisations and service providers in the community. Take an appointment with them to discuss community information needs, concerns and challenges. Develop a short list of questions to guide you through your interview. Ask them about their work and their organisational needs, their use of and access to information and communications technologies such as the telephone and the Internet. What radio stations do they enjoy listening to? Is radio sufficient to meet their information needs?

Speak to members of the community directly

You can do this formally by administering a survey and informally by talking to people on the bus, in the taxi and even in the supermarket queue.

Refer to the UNESCO Telecentre Cookbook for practical material on how to go about gathering information and understanding your community's needs. You can access this book on the Internet <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001230/123004e.pdf> or write to UNESCO to request a copy.

What role can the CMC play in dealing with community issues?

You need think about how your CMC can respond to issues once you have mapped the community and identified specific areas of concern.

Information and communication needs analysis

First, think of the information and communication needs that relate to the issues. E.g., let us take the case of a community with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS – is information about home-based care available for AIDS patients and their families; is any information available about prevention and treatment? Do school children have access to the information that could make them aware and help them respond to the issues? Do health care workers in the community have information that can help them perform better? Is there a need to mobilise funding to support the prevention of HIV transmission? Do mothers understand all the issues around the transmission of HIV to babies? (Refer also to community needs analysis above.)

Existing sources of information

Next, try to understand how people are already sharing information in the community. Analyse the information from your community mapping process to help you identify the important information hubs.

Whenever possible, assess to what extent the existing services meet the needs you defined earlier. Are there any gaps? Do people know about the type of support they can get from the local clinic? Often information services are under-utilised because people don't know about them. The CMC can play an important role in breaching this gap.

CMC responses: information and communication services

Then look at the services that the CMC can provide in response to key community issues and challenges.

Respect and value different perspectives

There are many ways of looking at any problem or situation. Look out for a range of perspectives and keep an open mind – just because it is written does not mean it is always, necessarily true.

The interests of one community might conflict with that of another – this should not change the importance of either community on the part of the CMC. For example, residents might want police to patrol the streets at night for a safer neighbourhood but this could conflict with the interests of policemen who are already overworked and underpaid.



Photo courtesy: Habby Bugalama

A Bantu drama group from Sengerema Telecentre demonstrates the use of the telephone at a community cultural event



Examples of information and communication services include:

- written materials that people can use in the CMC, or borrow from the CMC, e.g., books, magazines, brochures
- material that people can pick up at the CMC and take home to read, e.g., pamphlets
- visual material, e.g., posters, comic strips and cartoons
- a list of information services
- radio broadcast programmes, e.g., talk shows, features, interviews
- public meetings and discussions, e.g., with invited speakers, or community members sharing their experience.

Place your views in a table once you organise your ideas and information and share with your colleagues and community members.

Measuring impact

Think about how you can measure the impact your CMC makes on the main areas of concern in the community.

Keep a record of how the CMC facilities are used and the level of community participation that is taking place. Simple numbers that show how many people (with a breakdown of their age, sex, and occupation) use the CMC during the year can be very useful in future planning.

Also try to gather information about the people that listen to your radio programmes.

Community participation in the CMC



The success and sustainability of the CMC depends on community participation. The more the community participates in the CMC, the greater awareness it shall have about CMC services.

Plan and facilitate community participation through different aspects of your work and throughout the life cycle of the CMC. This starts from planning all the way to periodic evaluation and impact assessment.

CMC 'governance'

There are many definitions of 'governance'. Put simply, it is the process of ensuring that there is accountability in the way your CMC is managed and operated. It is crucial to establish a governing or advisory body for your CMC and to make sure that the community is well represented on this body.

Community participation checklist

Consider the following processes and make sure that community participation is taken into account in every step.



Process	How is the community participating?
CMC planning (at the very beginning)	
CMC start up phase	
Understanding community needs	
Community resource mapping	
Governance	
Fundraising	
Planning new services	
Evaluation and impact assessment	
Others	

Allocate time and space for networking and partnerships in:

- strategic planning
- staff meetings
- governing body meetings
- progress reports and project reports
- annual reports

Keep a running list of which mailing lists CMC staff are subscribed to and share the task of updating these with one another.

Working with others

Your CMC forms only part of the overall fabric of initiatives and service providers in your area. Understanding how you fit into the overall picture is essential.

Think about building coalitions, partnerships, and collaborations with other service providers — institutions, government, the private sector, civil society — at local, regional and international levels. Also consider establishing relations in a thematic context, e.g., content, training, etc. Some partnerships may turn out to be broad and open-ended offering little more than information exchange but other partnerships can be concrete and may involve joint project implementation.

Civil society is increasingly working in networks. Close partners can turn out to be organisations that are based in a different part of the world with whom face-to-face meetings are rare. Most people who have email access belong to at least one mailing list, or an online discussion forum, and most community initiatives are part of a local, national or international network.

It is common that individual CMC members forget to record who they are networking with due to a busy schedule. Always make sure that you keep track of who your partners are and which networks you participate in.

Partnerships and networking in the community

In building partnerships start with the information you gathered during the community mapping exercise. Use this list as a starting point for identifying potential partners. Make sure you cover at least — civil society organisations and NGOs, self-organised community based initiatives, business initiatives, government initiatives, media, development agencies, and donors.

Partnerships and networking with other CMCs and similar initiatives

Contact other CMCs and community media in your region. There might also be telecentres, multi-purpose community centres and other community information resource centres that you could usefully network with.

International networking and partnerships – a few examples

Contact international organisations such as

AMARC (World Association for Community Radio) <http://www.amarc.org>

UNESCO <http://portal.unesco.org/>

APC (Association for Progressive Communications) <http://www.apc.org>.



There might also be networks that focus on some of the issues you prioritise in your CMC, for example, if you focus on HIV/AIDS look out for networks that can add value to your work.

Important considerations in networking

Networking is time consuming. Make sure that:

- networking adds value to your work
- you define goals and outcomes for networking and participation in networks
- you plan in terms of person time and financial resources (e.g. attending meetings)

Important considerations in partnership

Be strategic. Understand the value of partnerships and set your goals accordingly. If you are entering a partnership with another institution make sure that you know:

- what kind of partnership it is (formal, informal, project oriented)
- what the goal of the partnership is
- who is responsible for managing the partnership

If the partnership involves collaborating on a project, it is *very* important that:

- roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, ideally in the form of a detailed work plan and memorandum of agreement (MOU)
- financial accounting is done carefully and transparently
- you have a management committee responsible for the project with all partners represented
- everyone understands the purpose of the project and the partnership
- you share information and reach agreements on how to execute so that all partners receive recognition

Partnership and networking take up a large amount of time but as long as this is strategically planned, your CMC team will benefit enormously from the many opportunities of networking. Networks can help us learn new things, meet new people, generate new ideas and access support when we need it most.

Remember that even if we work at the local level we are part of a worldwide movement of people who are working for sustainable development and social justice.

References

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