

Centre For Building Better Community

Asset Mapping for Informal Settlements: An approach to mitigating the effects of Covid-19

Executive Summary

Asset mapping as part of a process to fight Covid-19 in informal settlements provides the community with an opportunity to discover the assets (strengths, skills, people, organisations etc) that can be utilised to be part of the solutions needed at this particular time.

For NGOs and communities to fully engage with asset mapping there needs to be 3 significant shifts in thinking:

- A change from seeing people who need help to seeing people who have value, contribution and agency
- A change from seeing deficits to seeing possibilities
- A change from seeing simple cause and effect to recognising our communities are complex systems

Specifically for the purpose of fighting Covid-19 a process of asset mapping could look like this:

- Gather a group
- Design a strategy
- Answer the question who or what does your community have that can help you work your strategy
- Monitoring and adjusting (action / reflection)

Finally, this approach can be adopted post Covid-19 and become part of a broader community led approach to development.

Introduction

This brief document has 3 purposes:

1. To outline some mind set changes needed for practitioners to embrace a strength based approach to dealing with Covid-19 in informal settlements
2. To propose a simple strength based methodology that could be adopted by community groups in informal settlements as a way of mitigating the effects of Covid-19
3. The paper will also touch briefly of the longevity of this approach post the Covid-19 crisis in helping informal settlements be places of flourishing.

I will give a brief background on who we are as an organisation, then describe some mind set changes needed to adopt a strength based approach for our current situation. I'll then supply an outline of how this could be applied and finally how this approach is useful in the longer term.

Background

Based in Melbourne, Australia, but with a global reach, CBBC is a hub for applied research and holistic change. As an NGO we are committed to the creation of a world where everyone and every community can flourish.

We produce high quality research to inform policy and practitioner work; We provide consultancy services to help governments, NGO's, community groups and the private sector work more holistically towards flourishing; we develop and deliver training for professionals, students and local communities to integrate holistic community and city development into their studies and practice; we create opportunities for people to come

together both in person and online for culture shaping conversations. CBBC is committed to working collaboratively to make a positive difference in all types of community.

Working with a strength based methodology

It has been my observation that many community development practitioners, domestic and international don't fully understand or appreciate the simplicity and power of a strength based approach to practice. Some who even use the rhetoric of strength based or Asset Based Community Development (ABCD: Designed by Kretzman and McKnight) are not truly employing the methodology.

For us as professionals and practitioners to fully embrace a strength based approach there are a number of mindset changes we need to work with:

- 1. People who need our help vs People with value, contribution, agency.** From a Christian perspective it is easy to embrace that everyone is made in the image of God and therefore has intrinsic value and worth. In practice a harder hurdle can be recognising that everyone in the communities where we work, are not people in need of our help, but people who have contribution to the betterment of their situation, and the ability to employ or make real that contribution.
- 2. Deficit thinking vs possibility thinking.** Others might call this changing your thinking from a glass half empty to a glass half full. What do you see when you look at an informal settlement? Do you see all the problems and the hopelessness? Or do you see the industry, the possibilities, the inklings of hope. Contrary to the belief of some, looking at the positives does not deny the existence of the problems. However, if we are focused on the needs and the deficits that is all we'll see. It also subtly sets us up to be the heroes of the intervention or change. Alternatively, if we see the possibilities we can be facilitators of aspiration for the people themselves to be the change that is needed.
- 3. Linear Causality vs Complex Adaptive Systems.** If we see problems in informal settlements through a cause and effects lens we will provide simple solutions that most often will not affect the heart of the problem. For example if there is a lack of food security in a community, we might say, the solution is to bring them food. As well as creating dependence this does not touch the core of the problem being an inability for whatever reason to grow food. Taking a systems approach, you could work through with the community: their aspirations for food supply; then explore all the factors that make up the system of food supply; and those factors that are external yet exert pressure. With this being mapped a pathway toward a solution emerges as well as an understanding of the barriers.

As we begin to make these mindset changes we begin to naturally want to work with the strengths that are present in informal settlements, allowing ourselves and our organisations to fade at least a little into the background.

Encouragingly, many organisations are beginning to see the necessity of this approach. And it is never more needed than right now as informal settlements are faced with complex problems around infection mitigation of Covid-19. As one worker pronounced recently, 'there is no shipment of food coming this time.'

Using Strength Based approaches in the mitigation of Covid-19 and beyond

Obviously, we are in a crisis situation right now and we don't have the time to employ a full strength based approach to poverty reduction. However, we could encourage communities to use a simple tool known as Asset Mapping to discover what they already have in the face of Covid-19. In addition Some of us are already beginning to think about the opportunities that this crisis brings to encourage positive development within informal

settlements. Communities are likely to come together to fight the virus. However, this coming together can tend to me fairly thin. The danger is that life will return to normal, community effort dissipate post crisis.

Positively, what has been started with the creation of the asset map could then be broadened to a fuller community driven response to poverty:

- Appreciative Inquiry (creating of aspiration)
- Creation of a shared vision around the type of community they want to live in (social, economic, environmental place making)
- Asset mapping – what is already in the community to lead towards these aspirations
- Partnering for further development

We recognise that within this simple methodology there is a plethora of complexity that needs to be unpacked. However, we are convinced that informal settlements have the genesis of what they need to become places that are not only sustainable but where people can flourish.

Asset Mapping for Informal Settlements: In the fight against Covid-19

- **Gather a group of community leaders**
- Who are the people of influence in your community?
- Who is not included or represented at this gathering? invite them.
- Who are the most vulnerable in the community: the elderly, widows, migrants, refugees, etc. Make sure they are also represented.
- Look for people connected with medical centres or hospitals and include informal health healers.
- Invite these leaders to a meeting for the purpose of creating an asset map to fight Covid-19.
- If groups like this already exist, perhaps look to join or activate them

- **Create a strategy**
- What are the health workers and government saying at this time?
- How can these strategies be adapted to make sense in your community?
- What other strategies are needed?
 - hand washing; isolation; accurate communication; masks
 - How do you keep those most at risk safe?
- You will also want to make sure that you don't put stress on other life giving systems ie supply of food and water

- **What do you already have in your community that can help you fight Covid-19 (The asset map)**
- *What skills do **people** in your community have?*
- *How can you work with **the Medical Centres / hospitals?***
- *How can you work with the **informal healers***
- Are their **businesses** that can donate supplies to the effort?
- Can **organisations** be mobilised to help?
- Can **Community groups** be mobilised to help?
- What can different indoor and outdoor **spaces** be used for?
- **Supplies:** How can you work together as a community to make sure everyone has their basic needs?
- **Ways of spreading a message** Make sure you have accurate information. What are the best ways to communicate to your community? What communication is already available? i.e. UNICEF, etc.

- **Keep monitoring the situation**
- Keep checking in that your actions are moving towards your overall strategy
- Keep updating your asset map as new things come to mind
- Check to see if your strategy needs to change at any point

**Asset map
Working Document**

- 1. Gather a group of community leaders**
 - a. Place their names; contact information and group represented in the boxes below**

Name	Contact Information	Group Represented

2. Create a strategy

a. What are the health workers and government saying at this time?

b. How can their instructions be adapted to make sense in your community?

c. What other strategies are needed?

3. What do you have in your community that can help you fight Covid-19 in the way you have decided to? (The asset map)

People

- What skills do you already have?

Name	Skills

Medical Centres / hospitals

- How can you connect with these institutions? What do they bring?

Who are the informal healers? These people need to be engaged also.

- What can they bring to the community effort?

Businesses

- Are their businesses that can donate supplies to the effort?

Business Name	Contact Person	Contact Details	What they offer

Organisations (including churches and other religious institutions)

- What are they already doing? Can they be mobilised to help more?

Organisation	Contact Person	Contact Details	What they offer

Community groups

- What are they already doing? Can they be mobilised to help more?

Business Name	Contact Person	Contact Details	What they offer

Spaces

- What can different indoor and outdoor spaces be used for at this time?

Supplies

- How can you work together as a community to make sure everyone has their basic needs met?

Ways of spreading a message

- Make sure you have accurate information
- What are the modes of communication in your community?
 - People of influence; Posters; Radio; Text message
 - What communication is already available? i.e. UNICEF, etc.

4. Keep monitoring the situation

- An asset map is a fluid document, keep checking in that your actions are moving towards your overall strategy
- Keep updating your asset map as new things come to mind
- Check to see if your strategy needs to change at any point

Your notes on what needs updating