COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING

Creative Action Toolkit Guide

creative action
INSTITUTE

INTRODUCTION

Community asset mapping is a powerful tool to collectively identify the existing strengths and positive aspects within a community by finding out all the places, people, programs and institutions that are available for safety, healing, connection, growth and empowerment. This allows individuals to increase their awareness, build stronger relationships and access the support and resources they need for improved health, safety and well-being. Community assets can be anything that affects their quality of life and can include: schools, health clinics, tutoring resources, recreational clubs, job training programs, businesses, non-profit organizations, faith-based institutions, law enforcement agencies, places of natural beauty, parks, open space, or community centers. Community assets also include people such as decision-makers, artists, mentors, healers, experts, counselors, elders, chiefs, etc.

Through learning walks, photographs and face-to-face interviews, girls act as community researchers to create a visual inventory of the cultural, health and economic resources, as well as other opportunities that are available within their community. They can share this information broadly with other girls through presentations and workshops so that they know where to go for help, safety, resources or support. By identifying the positive assets, a community can also highlight what is lacking and/or the barriers that exist to accessing them. By engaging the girls in a process of identifying existing resources, they gain knowledge of the overall status of their community and can make an effective case for policies, resources and actions that are still needed.

We hope this Creative Action Toolkit provides the girls and residents of your community with the skills and information you need to access existing resources and be more effective advocates for social change!
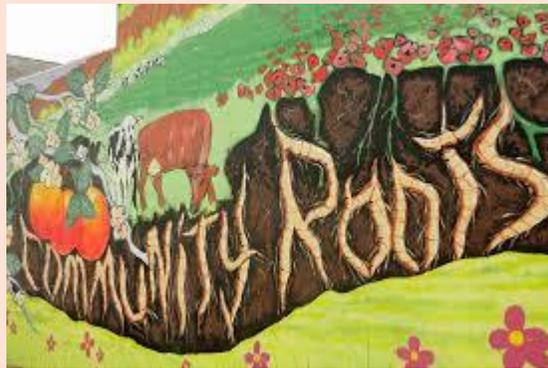
Community Knowledge Hub

GOALS FOR USE OF THIS TOOLKIT

- Learn participatory research techniques
- Identify positive and available assets and resources within a community
- Identify barriers to access and additional resources needed
- Use community asset mapping as a tool to educate and empower girls with awareness and access to sources of safety, education and support
- Advocate for policies or actions to strengthen existing community resources for women and girls

Community Asset Map template for a healthy community

MATERIALS YOU WILL NEED

- Workshop space
- Research topic
- Interview questions
- Notebooks and pens
- Clipboards
- Audio recording equipment (optional)
- Camera (optional)
- Big paper or posterboard, black board
- Markers, paint, pastels or other art supplies

ACTION STEPS

1. **Determine the focus of the project.**
   What community assets do you want to identify? Do you want to create a map for girls to know what resources are available for issues regarding violence and safety? Perhaps you want to know how to access information and services related to sexual, emotional and reproductive health. Or maybe you want to identify all possible vocational resources and economic opportunities. It can be one or many of these topics. Decide what kind of information would be useful and relevant for the girls and women in your community.

2. **Determine what elements you want to include in your map.[1]**

   The components of a community asset map can fall into the following categories:

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[1] http://www.communityscience.com/knowledge4equity/AssetMappingToolkit.pdf

- *Individuals:* The strengths, talents and wisdom of local residents and community members. What are the skills, experiences, knowledge, passions, and capacities of the people within your community? Who can you turn to for wisdom or support? Make sure to consider young people and elders!
- *Voluntary groups:* These are social, cultural, athletic/sports, recreational or other groups, clubs or associations that exist in your community and are run by volunteers. Are there community councils, song circles, choirs, chess clubs, sports teams or neighborhood organizing groups that are relevant to your research topic?
- *Public institutions:* These include places like schools, police stations, health clinics, libraries or government agencies that offer resources or information. What public institutions offer services for girls and women?
- *Physical locations:* These might include beautiful landscapes or inspiring views, a special tree or clearing in a forest, a courtyard in the local church or mosque, a local park, community center or walking trail that can provide space for community gatherings and trainings or simply for privacy and quiet reflection. What places and physical locations can be a resource?
- *Faith-based groups:* This could be the local churches, temples, mosques or programs are available for support and guidance. What spiritual resources exist in your community?
- *Economic assets:* These could include local businesses, informal economic exchanges, apprenticeship programs, micro-lending opportunities, barter relationships, technical programs, organized market centers, job training or mentorships. How can girls get the support they need for economic security?

3. **Decide how you are going to collect the data and provide training.[2]**

    Once you determine the methods you want to use, delegate the different roles and responsibilities so that everyone participates in gathering some part of the data. Some potential options for data gathering:

    Interviews: Conducting interviews is a common tool for identifying community resources. Determine who in the community might be able to provide knowledge, expertise and guidance. Make a list of questions based on the information you want to gather and invite their personal perspective and stories. During the interview, describe the project, establish a positive and friendly rapport and express your appreciation for their time and contribution. Find out what they know, what skills they have, what they can offer, and what stories, opinions and connections they can share. Ask them if there are other people who you should interview to get more information. Let them know how you will be using the information and invite them to any public presentations!

    Learning walks: Walk through the neighborhood or community in pairs or small groups to map out and collect information. This provides a first-hand view of your community to provide all the location information you need to put on your map. You might want to have a basic map with an outline of the community that you can draw on as you go. You can combine the walk with interviews of community members along the way. Specific stories, events, examples, experiences, and observations provided by community members should be noted. You can also take photographs or videos to capture your observations, which can be included on the map.

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[2] http://www.communityscience.com/knowledge4equity/AssetMappingToolkit.pdf

Observe your community with new eyes and take note of details of where people hang out, as well as different social identities such as different cultures, genders or age groups. You might notice that the women gather around a public well to share stories and information with each other or old men playing chess in a park.

As the groups walk through the neighborhood, take note of any needs or problems that exist. Are there places that are unlit or unsafe to walk? Are there sufficient bathroom facilities for girls in their schools? Is the local river contaminated with trash? Is there a particular place that young people hang out?

Community meetings or events: Host a community forum or story circle. Bring together a group of people to sit in a circle and share their personal stories, experiences and resources about the topic you are researching. It is a great way for the community to participate in identifying their valuable resources, deepen connections and hear different perspectives about the issue. You can go around the circle, one-by-one, ask everyone to introduce themselves and share their opinions or stories. After everyone is done, open the circle for people to ask questions, make comments or have a dialogue. Make sure to thank everyone and let them know how and when you will share your findings!

Surveys: You can make up a survey to distribute to community members to fill out and identify the resources they know within each category. You might need to provide verbal explanation and support if the person taking the survey cannot read and write.

4. **Share and analyze the data as a group**
   - Report back to each other what you discovered in your interviews, meetings, surveys or learning walks.

- Sketch out your observations and locations on a big piece of paper.
- Make a list under two columns with the titles: Assets and Needs.
- Discuss any patterns or common themes you notice or discoveries that surprised you.
- Broaden the discussion by asking the group what items they would add to the lists, i.e. other assets and needs that the youth are aware of but may not have observed directly during their walk.

5. Create your visual map

Using flipchart paper or poster board, draw a map of your local community and add the community assets that are most relevant. You can use photographs, drawings, words and other natural materials to make the map visually clear and compelling. Here is a template you can use for inspiration:
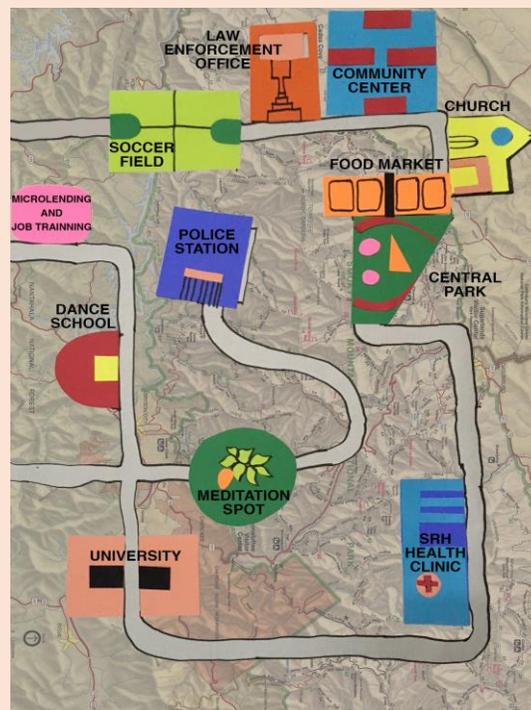
Created by Isa Carrio in Punta Gorda, Belize

6. **Make it creative!**

Try to include creative or cultural elements along with your visual map so that your presentation is compelling and multi-dimensional. You might want to develop, find or include the following:

- Cultural songs or dances
- Written or recorded stories or testimonies
- Theater skits to illustrate a particular asset or need
- Poetry inspired by your findings that capture the wealth and strength of your community
- Photo exhibit to highlight the resources or needs – this can include landscapes, portraits or collage
- Traditional sayings or metaphors that are progressive and uplift the community

7. **Develop a plan to share and disseminate your findings.**

In addition to creative and cultural elements, consider the following for your presentation:

- *What:* What is the story that you are trying to tell? What do you want to achieve?
- *Who:* Who will present the information? Who is your audience? Who will you show these findings to? Girls at your school or neighboring schools? Parents and teachers? Power holders in the community? The school board? Community members?
- *When:* When would be the best time to present this information?
- *How:* How will you present this information and research? In a report? On your website? With a performance?

- *Where:* Will you share your presentation at a community meeting or in school classrooms? What location will best support the community to observe and discuss your findings?

SCALE THE IMPACT

Advocate for change!

"Advocacy is speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution. Advocacy is working with other people and organizations to make a difference."

- CEDPA: Cairo, Beijing and Beyond: A Handbook on Advocacy for Women Leaders

Advocating for change means that you are targeting your demands toward a policy or decision maker in your community and results in a positive change for individuals and groups in a community.

Once community strengths and resources are identified and depicted in a map, you can more easily think about how to build on those assets to address community needs.

Some basic advocacy steps:[3]

1. **Define your goals**
   - Based on the assessment of the assets and needs that you identified in your mapping process, what do you want? What needs to change? What would you like to see be better?
   - Identify what kind of change you are seeking. For example, is it legislation / laws, policy, programs, funding, access, services, etc. that will improve the rights, safety and health of girls and women in your community.

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[3] http://www.chpca.net/media/7413/8_Steps_to_Good_Advocacy.pdf

- What are the short term *and* long term goals that you want to accomplish in your community?
- What are the existing resources that you identified? What are the gaps or capacities you need to develop in order to advocate for your goals? i.e. media skills, research, outreach

2. **Know your audience**
   - Identify the key stakeholders (people who are interested or are affected by this issue).
   - Research the best way to communicate with each one. Why should they care? How would this benefit them?
   - Who are your potential opponents? Do your homework! What do they believe? Why do they oppose this issue? How do they benefit from the situation as it is? What are their interests? What might they do to block your proposal? How might you convince them to care or change their position?

3. **Know your facts**
   - Prepare a fact sheet along with your map to support your position.
   - List the most important and persuasive points to argue your case. Why is this important? How will it benefit the entire community?

4. **Determine your message**
   - Be clear on what you are asking for
   - Keep it simple and focused
   - Use positive language
   - Tailor your message to the audience you want to reach
   - Appeal to their self-interest
   - Use both evidence and stories

5. **Build your base of support**
    - Determine the best approach to reach out to the broader community.
    - Are there other organizations or influential community leaders who would support your proposal?
    - Develop relationships and connections with everyone who might support your cause.
    - Who are the best people to deliver this message?

6. **Identify your delivery methods and creative actions**
    - Raise public awareness about this issue with creative social actions.
    - There are so many possibilities for awareness campaigns:
        - Ads, posters, flyers, Tshirts, ribbons, buttons
        - Local community or cultural events
        - Workshops and clubs in schools
        - Social media memes, photos, stories
        - Theater, songs, poetry, dances, parades, kite festivals

7. **Know the political process**
    - Identify the key power-holders and decision-makers and the role they play.
    - Plan your approach to each key person.
    - Establish meetings with elected officials or decision makers
    - Generate petitions for people to sign and show their support.
    - Do a letter-writing campaign.
    - Make presentations at government meetings.

8. **Use the media to raise awareness and support**
    - Contact local media sources: radio, TV, newspaper, to discuss your issue

- Write press releases or Op-Eds.
- Make a press conference and invite all the media.
- Make sure sources are credible and information is timely.
- Localize the issue and give it a human interest angle.
- Show that there is a broad base of support.

9. **Make your action plan**
   - Identify clear steps including who is responsible for each task and include a timeline.
   - Communicate the plan with partners and get additional support.
   - Celebrate short term victories and stay focused on the long term goal!

CAI supports you in lifting your voices and being powerful agents for change in the world. Please share your journey with us and the Urumuri Dada network! We hope this Creative Action Toolkit serves you in identifying and celebrating the strengths and assets in your community, as well as more effectively advocate for girls' rights or whatever issue you want to address.