Refugee Reproductive Health Needs Assessment Field Tools
Refugee Leader Questions
Introduction

Purpose of the Tool

Refugee Leader Questions were designed as an “icebreaker” or introduction to the needs assessment process for those leaders from the refugee community who must give their official or unofficial approval. In addition to being gatekeepers, however, these leaders should also be appreciated as a valuable source of information about the community. Community leaders can discuss not only the reproductive health needs as someone who has certain responsibilities for the welfare of the group, but also can answer questions which provide insight into characteristics of the community to help design a more effective needs assessment.

Planning to Interview Refugee Leaders

Choosing the appropriate leaders for this activity is key. These individuals may be more easily identifiable in some situations than in others. Generally speaking, these will be members of the refugee community who serve some administrative function in their community and act as liaisons between the refugees and camp administrators (UNHCR staff). They may be elected in their communities or appointed, though not necessarily either. Probably the best way to identify them is by asking (1) UNHCR officials (2) staff of implementing agencies and (3) members of the refugee communities. Pay attention to the discrepancies in the answers if they occur. There may be several layers of gatekeepers who all should be interviewed. For example, there may be people for whom formal approval must be given, but there also may be opinion leaders in the community whose blessing is needed before others will feel comfortable enough to answer questions frankly.

The number of community leaders who should be interviewed will depend on the exact circumstances of the situation. At the very least, all leaders from whom official approval is necessary for the populations to be involved in the needs assessment should be interviewed. After that, it will be a judgment call based on the balance between the amount of useful information (and “buy-in”) obtainable which is added by each interview compared to the amount of time and effort that might be better spent on other needs assessment activities. If a number of different communities are included in the overall needs assessment, it is important to interview informal leaders from at least a sample of these communities to determine what variations occur and/or how similar the answers among the various leaders are. Varying perceptions of needs among leader will be an important finding in a needs assessment and may have implications for program design.

The interview can be as short or as long as you have time and interest. You should be flexible with regard to how you conduct the interview. **Not all questions in this interview guide will be applicable to the refugee situation in which you are working**. You will want to ask as many questions as are appropriate and for which you have time, but it is important for you as the interviewer to determine ahead of time which questions these are. Some questions are very general and are designed to give general background information. If you really already know some of these things, it may not be necessary to ask. On the other hand, there may be some topics for which more detailed information -- and therefore, more questions -- may be necessary as they are related to the specific objectives of the overall needs assessment. For example, if your organization is especially interested in services for complications of abortion, additional questions should be included to get the information needed.

You may notice that a number of questions in this tool are redundant to the group discussion questions. Many of the questions about practices and services are actually questions about people's perceptions. The information obtained from a number of sources through interviews or a group discussion is not actually redundant because it is important to discover where there are discrepancies between the perceptions of refugee clients and the perceptions of administrators about what is available/accessible and what is still needed. You might also use this opportunity to learn how people in the leader's community talk about certain practices that will help you in the group discussions. You might also learn about what is too sensitive to discuss.

On the other hand, you may not have enough time to ask these questions and will want to focus on the community background questions. The reproductive health questions are good to have on hand, however, to provide as examples of questions to be asked of the group discussion participants, should the community leader want to know what they are.

You can think about these questions as being divided into modules and can decide to eliminate some of these models altogether or you can pick and choose specific questions within the modules.

It will be very useful to ask local UNHCR and/or implementing agency staff to read through the questions and identify any unclear or controversial questions or topics. The questions should be translated by native speakers -- camp (refugee) staff, if possible, and then backtranslated into English. The questions should be pretested at least once with a native speaker before they are asked of leaders and then revised, if necessary.

If possible, the interviewer should be a native speaker who can ask the questions directly. Otherwise, the interviewer could be accompanied by a translator. Because part of the purpose of this interview is at least quasi-official, it may be necessary for someone from the organization doing the needs assessment to be involved and/or present during the questions.

Interviewing the Refugee Leader

Once the leaders have been identified, the appropriate questions chosen, translated and pretested, then it is time to ask the questions. Because the primary purpose of these interviews is to obtain approval for the rest of the process, this must be the first tool used.

Refugee leaders should be contacted through appropriate channels to request their participation in this exercise. A time should be scheduled for the interview; the leader should be told ahead of time how long you expect the interview to last. The interviewer should meet the leader at a place of his or her choosing and conduct the interview as politely as possible, remembering that this is primarily a diplomatic mission and not investigative reporting.

It is critical that you are honest about what you are doing and that you honor the opinion of the community leader if you ask for it. The refugee leader can give you important feedback about what is and is not culturally appropriate to discuss in the group discussions. If the refugee leader tells you not to talk about a particular topic, then don't. Even if they don't attend the group discussions, it is likely that they will hear about what is discussed. If a refugee leader gives an answer which he or she says is "off the record," it should be "off the record." If a tape recorder is being used, it should be turned off and no notes should be written down about it.

Data Processing and Analysis

This guide is not intended to be a questionnaire form, but rather a guide to the kinds of questions appropriate for community leaders. Data for these interviews are best collected as field notes rather than as answers written out in a questionnaire for each item. The easiest technique is for the interviewer to have a list of topics to be covered and then to take notes throughout the interview. Many leaders will have no objections to being tape recorded. Whether recording is possible or not, the interviewer and/or an assistant should also take notes. These notes should be kept as field notes with the names and titles of the leaders and the date and place of the interview included. Notes should be retyped if possible. Responses to questions probably will not require sophisticated analysis, but will provide important background information and should be as legible and coherent as possible for others to read.

Feedback and Dissemination of Results to the Community and Others

The most immediate use of these notes will be in designing and/or revising the needs assessment. After that, they should be considered as part of the overall findings of the needs assessment. Feedback from the refugee leader responses will be most appropriate as part of the dissemination of the overall needs assessment. Comparisons and contrasts to findings from other sources may be useful in program design. Certainly the refugee leaders would be included in the design of new or restructured programs and the needs assessment findings would be made available to them in that way. They should have the chance to react to the way in which their answers were integrated into analyses based on the needs assessment data. Ideally, the refugee leaders should participate in this analysis process.

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