3rd Biennial Meeting of Caribbean National Observatories on Drugs

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Overview of the Drug Information Network Project

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Importance of Drug Information Networks

- A drug information network for the purposes of this project is defined as a group of people who, representing either themselves or an agency, collect, analyze and disseminate information on drugs for the purpose of monitoring trends, developing policy, and implementing appropriate programs and responses.
Importance of Drug Information Networks cont’d

- Central and Southwest Asia (Central Asian Epidemiology Work Group)
- European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)
- Surveillance System for Epidemiological Addictions (SISVEA) in Mexico
- South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU)
- Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU)
- USA Community Epidemiology Working Group (CEWG)
Description of Project
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Goal:

• To improve the participating countries’ performance in the making of drug policy, design and implementation of responses and programs, and the evaluation of outcomes through the use of timely, valid, and reliable information.
Description of Project

Specific Objectives:
• To establish drug information networks in five (5) countries. This is also the main objective.
• To improve the availability, quality and timeliness of information related to drug production, trafficking, use, and the consequences thereof in the participating countries.
• To improve the level of participation and performance in the MEM
Major Activities

• Identify the coordinators for the networks in each country.
• Carry out a two-day regional training workshop for the coordinators in the most cost effective location.
• Develop and publish a data protocol for the DINs
• Undertake Needs & Resources Analyses in participating countries
• Publish Needs & Resource analysis report
• Carry out a one-day sensitization meeting in each country for information network members
• Prepare report of meeting outcomes
Major Activities cont’d

• Gather data from network member using a data gathering protocol
• Review of data by coordinators and CICAD Process and analyze data
• Draft network report
• Review of reports by stakeholders
• Publish Network Report
• Convene a meeting of stakeholders and to discuss the implications of the report for policy and practice in each country
• Draft, publish and disseminate final project report and evaluation
Objectives of the Workshop and Roadmap:
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• To introduce participants to the concepts that underpin national drug information networks
• To teach the steps that are required to establish a DIN.
• To examine the elements of a DIN and to see how they work together.
• To provide a set of tools for network coordinators to establish and maintain a network in their respective countries
• To discuss the experiences of other countries’ information networks
Development of a national drug information network
Elements of a Drug Information Network

• A coordinator
• An interactive network of professionals and agencies
• A standardized way of collecting and reporting information
• A network meeting, at least once a year, where members discuss their data in the following context:
  – Identifying existing drug use and drug trafficking patterns
  – Identifying important changes in drug use or drug trafficking
  – Discussing the implications of the data for policy and practice
• Present their data to policy makers and to the general public where possible
• An annual report
• A dissemination plan for important publications
Data Sources

• Existing Data
  – Hospital admissions, emergency dept logs, public health reports, coroners and medical examiners’ records, Treatment center records
  – Drug related Crime stats (arrests, seizures, prosecutions, convictions) from police, customs and other law enforcement

• General Surveys (Households)
• Special population surveys (school students, prisons, universities, out of school youth, treatment centers, emergency rooms, drug users)
• Rapid Assessments
• Key Informant Interviews, focus groups
Data Sources cont’d

NB
When starting an information system in a country where existing data sources are not developed, key informants can still provide unstructured reports from their own experience. For example, in some African countries, the initial network meeting received reports from treatment specialists, doctors and community workers on the nature of the drug problem in their particular area.
Remember!

The two main Network objectives to keep in mind are:

• Obtaining knowledge about the drug problem
• Further developing and strengthening the network

Also try to observe the following key features of a network:

• It should be comprehensive: including diversity with the representation of a number of perspectives, such as treatment, law enforcement, health policy and research;
Remember!

• It should be small enough to allow presentation of information and discussion of findings;
• It should be flexible enough to allow the inclusion of additional expertise
• It should be led by a coordinator who will organize meetings, agendas and reporting. Meetings can be chaired by different members of the network from time to time
• It should be committed to meeting on a regular basis and at least once a year, preferably twice a year depending on the dynamic nature of the drug problem.
Step 1 – Information Needs and Resources Analysis

- this is a way to create an inventory of potential data sources and provides the tools to assess these data sources. The Coordinators should carefully examine what each potential network member brings to the table in terms of data and information, research abilities, ability to communicate, and ability to contribute.
Step 2 – First network meeting

• This meeting is extremely important since it will serve to introduce members to the raison d’être of the network. It will also introduce them to the way the network will function, what the inputs and outputs will be, and what the products will be used for.
Some more advice about this first meeting:

• Start small. Be selective about who you invite to attend. It is better to start with a small manageable group, and then add persons as other sources are identified...or to change members as the need arises.

• Have clear attainable objectives for the meeting. Avoid trying to do too much during this first meeting

• Establish an agenda in coordination with other participants so that they feel invested from the beginning

• Give each participant a role to play and a contribution to make.
Objectives of the first meeting should be to:

• Identify known and potential sources of data and information. Selected participants can be asked to describe particular data sets and to prepare and briefly present data from their sources of data.

• Review the types of data sources (indicators) to determine if they are available in your country. If yes, then steps should be taken to identify agencies and individuals who can provide access to these sources.

• Assign participants to follow-up activities after the meeting. These activities will most likely be the collection of data or to acquire further information on data sources.

• Determine how the information from meetings should be recorded, reported and disseminated. This is extremely important because the product that this network ‘trades’ in, is information. premature and unnatural death.

• Identify potential sources of support (political, financial) for the network, and use them.
Subsequent meetings

Subsequent meetings should also be short since members of the network will most likely be busy people, but sufficient time should always be allocated for:

• Every participant with data to present his or her findings

• After each presentation or group of presentations, discussion of what the data or information shows.

• Follow-up on issues that may have been raised at earlier meetings

• Discussion of the agenda, date, time, and place of next meeting
What type of data or information should a network collect?

- Treatment center data
- Arrests, seizures, and other law enforcement data
- Drug use statistics from surveys and other research
- Hospital emergency room data
- Forensic Science labs
- Public Health data
- Expert opinion
Step 4 – Publication of Annual report

• If you do not publish and disseminate the findings of your network, it can easily become useless, and die a natural death
Further steps

Once the network is up and running, then the following steps can be considered as the network matures:

- Further standardization of data
- Expanding or changing membership
- Upgrading data systems for network members
- Developing a web-based data system
- More publications (newsletters, research reports, etc)
Progress

- St. Vincent and Haiti have completed their obligations under this phase of the project.
- St. Lucia, Guyana and Dominica are still working.
- All of the countries have hosted the network meetings.
- Only the required reports remain outstanding from the countries that are still working.
Lessons Learnt

• In order to implement the project there needs to be a coordinator as well as someone providing technical support.

• The process of getting stakeholders on board with the network takes a long time and needs multiple meetings, visits and telephone calls.

• If being done for the first time, the collection of data and preparation of reports for the network is difficult, and time consuming.

• There is relatively high turnover in this business.
Next Phase

- Complete phase 1 with modified work-plan for outstanding countries.
- Invite 4 new countries to participate.
- Train 4 coordinators and 4 technical assistants from each participating country.
- Carry out workplan in each participating country
In the long term...

• Every member state should have a drug information network
• There should be ongoing external support for member states to keep these networks alive
• Formation of a regional drug information network in the Caribbean.
Thank You