Communication channel matrix

A communication channel matrix represents a straightforward five-row/five-column grid designed to map out an array of communication channels used by CMAM programmes for exchanges with the target population. Frequently, CMAM programmes outsource the communication to community-health workers, who become community's exclusive persons of reference for the malnutrition and/or other matters. Less frequently, they may include mass media in the diffusion of key messages. Other communication channels are often undervalued or completely absent. In this respect, the communication channel matrix moves beyond being a mere assessment tool, transforming into a learning platform, the added value of which lies in demonstrating a full range of options and in tracing future opportunities.

The left-hand column of the communication channel matrix represents classic communication settings while the top row represents actions or communication objectives. Successively, each empty square is marked with ✓ or ✗ depending on the use of a respective communication channel within CMAM programming.

The concentration of ✓ signs in the "Diffusion of messages" column implies the so-called "top-down approach" where organisations simply "drop" their messages onto the beneficiary population which is consulted neither prior nor after the intervention. As this approach has been under constant criticism in many contexts, the aim is to move from mere diffusing to "engaging" and "empowering" communities to take ownership of problems which target their setting. In this respect, an optimal communication channel matrix for future programming should include at least a couple of communication settings for each objective – moving from a bottom left towards an upper right corner.

In early stages of "new and improved" community mobilisation strategies the "Community engagement" column may be difficult to implement as it requires a high level of community initiative to deal with local challenges outside of formal structures or partnerships of CMAM programmes. For this reason, CMAM programs may initially choose to leave it blank, making it the absolute goal of their community engagement efforts to fill those empty slots within few years' time.

Instructions:

1. The assessment team will need few sheets of flip chart paper and color markers.
2. Present them a template of a communication channel matrix, explaining the significance of all items in the left column and top row. Show them how the two interact.
3. Ask the team to reflect upon the use of various communication channels within CMAM programming and ask them to mark each square with ✓ or ✗ symbols, depending on whether a particular channel is utilized.
4. Ask the team to justify their observations with an example of activities falling under each category. Make sure that they do not use the same example for multiple channels.
5. Allow 30 – 60 minutes for the exercise. Encourage the team to discuss in detail, observe and guide them.
6. Towards the end of the exercise, ask the team to color the squares with a ✓ sign and interpret the results.
7. Consecutively, ask them to choose a different color and mark all squares with a ✗ sign, which could be used in future CMAM programming. Ask them to justify their choice.
8. It is recommended to pair the exercise with a "Seasonal calendar" and a "Social Mapping and Relationship Identification" tool, dividing the whole team into three groups working independently. This arrangement may save some time but a presentation of each team's work and a successive validation by the whole group must be planned for.