

Preventing infectious diseases at the community level: an asset ecosystems approach

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Abstract

Background Interlocking planetary health crises can reveal the complex nature of human and environmental interactions and highlight the importance of broader health ecosystems. Reductionist approaches to human health overlook broader systems factors, such as informal economies and environmental factors. However, these systems play a key role in the promotion of health and prevention of infectious diseases such as HIV and malaria. To better understand these factors, we applied a community and health asset ecosystem approach to infectious disease prevention, drawing on systems thinking and asset-based methods.

Methods We did a systematic review and qualitative synthesis, including English-language literature from community and participatory programmes in low-income and middle-income countries worldwide that were focused on Sustainable Development Goal 3.3, with no date restrictions. We applied a systems-minded, asset-based approach to analysis, to construct a community and health asset ecosystem and understand how community and health systems assets come together to prevent infectious diseases in dynamic, multilevel, and non-linear ways.

Findings We included eight papers in the final review, which were original qualitative and quantitative research articles and systematic reviews from community-based HIV and malaria prevention interventions. Systems of health assets spanned micro, meso, and macro levels, and were identified across the informal community setting and the formal health system setting. Community assets represented primary (those inherent to the individual or community), secondary (knowledge, technologies, and rules to harness primary resources), and tertiary (higher-level community processes promoting quality and stewardship of local assets) resources. Process factors driving the success of community programmes involved partnerships, engagement, sufficient resource availability, and community leadership.

Interpretation Beyond identifying systems of local assets for health, our approach emphasises the process of how these assets are best converted into meaningful outcomes. The community and health asset ecosystem reflects the complex human–environmental interface and sheds light on how individuals or communities can effectively and sustainably place a claim on assets necessary to achieve health.

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Contributors

ZO did the review and qualitative synthesis of the literature. GS developed the conceptual framework, cross-checked the analysis, and contributed to writing the paper.

Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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