Community Action Network (CAN) Starter Pack

Introduction

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has and will continue to have a massive impact, not only on our health system, but also on our economy.

While the lockdown is necessary to stop the spread of the virus, it has brought the economy to a standstill. This means that many more people will be without jobs and food, and some denied access to basic services.

During this time, people in and around your community, and in neighbouring areas could be in desperate need of food, medication, emergency interventions, assistance and support.

The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, along with a range of other organisations, has already called for ordinary South Africans to assist in ensuring food security, and now, with the adoption of the "Gauteng Together" initiative, they are appealing to us to join together, to help wherever help is needed.

The Gauteng model is based on the "CAN Together" initiative, spearheaded by a group called Cape Town Together, a model which is also being used in the Eastern Cape.

This initiative does not replace existing work, but complements it, by encouraging residents to link up with already established structures. It gives ordinary people – local volunteers – a platform to support or initiate localised work under lockdown conditions.

Community-led responses are critical. You can take up this call to action by establishing a Community Action Network (CAN).

This document is designed to support local neighbourhood groups, otherwise known as Community Action Networks, or CANs, to take collective action in response to COVID-19. It provides some ideas and tips about how to get started with strengthening your community's capacity to respond to COVID-19.

It covers the following topics:

- What is a CAN?

- The purpose of a CAN

- How to establish a CAN

- How to register your committee

- How to allocate roles to your volunteers and the key roles

- Tasks for the committee

- Characteristics of a CAN

- The importance of social solidarity

Here's what you need to know and what you need to do.

What is a CAN?

A CAN is a community-based network which brings together individuals from that community who identify its needs and initiate action to address these needs.

The network can also serve inter-community interests by pairing with other CANs. A CAN may be as small as a neighbourhood group, or an area-wide committee.

Street committees can be set up to work in co-ordination to form broader neighbourhood committees.

These committees are localised so that they can be operational during the lockdown, without the risk of travelling out of the region where you stay.

Community responses will look different in each neighbourhood depending on the needs of the area.

A CAN may be formed from scratch. But all are encouraged to become part of or collaborate with already established local groups. They are also encouraged to try to connect with committees in other communities. This means that while we act locally, we also draw on our collective experience and energy to share lessons, resources and capacity across the region.

The purpose of a CAN

The five purposes of a CAN are to:
1. Identify the needs in communities, and respond to those needs by distributing essential food and hygiene items, and assisting with other challenges including abuse of rights, access to services, education and awareness and combatting violence against women and children.
2. Pair up with surrounding communities to support food security or other initiatives.
3. Ensure that immediate community members put support mechanisms in place for those self-isolating.
4. Spread correct information on the pandemic at a localised level.
5. Identify needs in your broader area, and work towards addressing them.

How to establish a CAN

Follow these steps to establish a CAN:

1. Identify a core set of volunteers in your community or your organisation.

2. Designate one volunteer to be the administrator, who will be a point of contact for the CAN with the *Gauteng Together* committee.

3. All volunteers identified must log onto www.gautengtogether.org and fill in the 'sign up' form.

4. Every volunteer will be asked whether they want to start a CAN – the administrator of the CAN should say 'yes' and the rest of the volunteers should say 'no'.

5. Wait for a response. The administrator will be contacted via email with information about whether a CAN already exists within their locality and who to get in touch with if this is the case. If no CAN has already been established in the area, the administrator will be emailed with a 'starter pack' outlining the next steps for registering the CAN.

6. All other volunteers will be allocated to CANs in their area and be contacted with further details.

7. Allocation of particular roles to volunteers thereafter should be decided upon by CAN administrator in conjunction with volunteers within the area working under one CAN.

For more information, visit the Gauteng Together Facebook page.

How to allocate roles to your volunteers

The following roles are critical for each CAN:
1. Administrator
2. Communications team
3. Treasurer
4. Organiser
5. Safety officer

The roles of each are as follows:

1. The role of the Administrator

The role of the **administrator** is one of the most important ones in the team. They must:
- Collect the contact details of all CAN members
- Collect important documents and save them where other CAN members can access them.
- Keep records of decisions taken and tasks assigned to members.
- Link up with other local CANs, NGOs, businesses and community leaders.

2. The role of the Communications team

The **communications team** must:
- Develop a communication strategy that includes a platform for communicating among committee members and a way to spread the word about activities to others. This may include one or several of the following:
  - A WhatsApp group, an email mailing list, or online group calls (or a combination of these) to coordinate activities.
  - A Facebook page or another form of social media to tell others about activities and achievements.
  - A Telegram account

- Assign the task of managing communications to two or three proactive, high energy and engaging members as the CAN grows.
- Ensure that the communication strategy is inclusive, and that all your members have access to the platform you choose.

3. The role of the Treasurer

A **treasurer** should be appointed to:
- Monitor, record and report back about funds and resources that may come to the CAN and how those are used or disbursed.

4. The role of the Organiser

An **organiser** should be appointed to organise:
- Activities such as food parcel packaging and distribution and provision of other support.
- Volunteers to carry out programmes.

5. The role of the Safety Officer

A **safety officer** should be appointed to:
- Ensure that all health and safety standards are being met in carrying out activities
- Monitor health and safety standards.
- Ensure that lockdown laws are being upheld.

Tasks for the committee

The committee is required to do the following:
1. Make a communications plan to be used during lockdown.
2. Map your community's needs
3. Map your community's strengths and who is available to help
4. Facilitate the work to meet your community's needs

1. Make a communication plan to be used during lockdown

- Map your neighbourhood into smaller units, for example, streets. This will help to make sure you don't miss any households, and streamline communication.
- Assign a Street Leader for each street. Ideally the Street Leader should be a young and healthy person who can safely provide support where needed. This might mean that the Street Leader needs to be someone who lives alone or who lives with other young and healthy people.
- Ask the Street Leader to make contact, preferably via WhatsApp or telephone, with as many households on the street as possible and advise residents to contact them if they need help during the lockdown. Please ensure that this is done safely.

2. Map your community needs

Map your community's vulnerabilities, as well as its vulnerable people. This includes what makes your community vulnerable to COVID-19 and how people are made vulnerable during lockdown. This will help you to know where to focus your community action responses. One of the most important things to think about in your community mapping is people who are particularly vulnerable and might need extra support. People can be vulnerable because they are at high risk of getting sick from COVID-19, but some people are also vulnerable to the economic consequences of the pandemic. Think about who might need extra support from community volunteers during this time.

3. Map your community's strengths and resources

Map your community's strengths and resources available for the work. To do this, ask volunteers who know the community well to brainstorm some ideas.

Strengths include groups of people with existing relationships. For example:

- Close and supportive relationships between community members
- Existing formal and informal networks like community groups, religious organisations, NGOs, sports clubs, among others.
- Groups of people who are already mobilised in your community. You can link them in to your COVID-19 response activities.

Community resources are spaces, objects and individuals that could be helpful to your community-based activities. Community resources can include:

- People with particular skills, like organising and administration, media skills and cooking or healthcare experience.
- Spaces that might come in handy, such as church halls, community centre or parks.
- Local businesses that might be willing to donate supplies or money.
- People who have resources such as a bakkie, a photocopier, large pots and pans.

4. Do the work

Once you have identified all your community's need as well as strengths and resources, get started with the work.

The following are areas to consider:

- Identify the needs and ensure food security within the community.

- Support existing structures already doing work in that area.

- The sourcing, packaging and distribution of food hampers must be done in a sanitary environment.

- It is important to identify those self-isolating in a community and to set up ways to get cooked food/groceries and if the area has communal taps, get water to them.

- It is also important to identify the elderly and to do grocery shopping for them.

- Extend solidarity and support to CANs in less resourced areas and coordinate joint action

- The collection and usage of funds/resources for food security work is an important focus

- Set up tippy-taps / sanitisation points in communities where this is needed

- If the crisis deepens in time, help to identify potential quarantine sites and work with the government in servicing these with essentials like food, masks and sanitiser.

- Extend activism and mobilise support for additional water tankers if required.

- Create a support network for victims of gender-based violence, especially children who often cannot report abuse.

- Ensure that evictions are put on hold

- Monitor rights abuses

- Report price inflation.

- Support educational initiatives for children who cannot be homeschooled during lockdown (either because they are the children of essential workers and have no support, or because they do not have access to technology of learning materials during the lockdown).

- Share accurate information in ways that are accessible to the community.

Safe food distribution during lockdown

Remember when distributing food that it is possible to do more harm than good. It is very important to distribute food without spreading COVID-19. Any time we move from one part of the region to another, or send resources across the city, we risk spreading infection.

Remember that only registered essential service providers are officially permitted to move around to deliver goods and services. Wherever possible, use approved delivery services (for example, Checkers, Pick n' Pay, Woolworths, Dischem, and Clicks) to have essential goods delivered.

However, if you do manage to arrange for permits, or the delivery of food and other essentials to other neighbourhoods, or if you are simply delivering groceries to a neighbour, here are some tips for doing so safely.

Identifying needs and arranging delivery

It is important that food distribution activities respond to a real need in the recipient community and that food is ultimately received by the families and individuals that need it most. For this reason, the first step in any food distribution project should be to identify who needs help within your own community, or get

in touch with community leaders or local food committee members in a recipient community if this is where an intended distribution is being planned. Working together with leaders or members from the recipient community, you should:

- Identify what food products are most needed and in what quantities.
    - Consider whether distributing cooked food or grocery parcels would be better.
    - As far as possible include healthy, non-perishable foods.

- Decide on a date and time for the delivery.

The members or community leader in the recipient community can then communicate the delivery time to the families and individuals most in need. Do not attempt to supply food to large numbers of people at one time. Limit the food donation to 50 parcels going to 50 families or individuals.

Packing food supplies

- Wash your hands thoroughly, and don't touch your face. If you do touch your face, wash your hands again before touching the food supplies.
- Wear a mask while preparing or handling the food supplies.
- Disinfect the surfaces you are working on with diluted bleach.
- Remember to open windows and ensure airflow in the room, as bleach can irritate the lungs.
- Pack the food/supplies into plastic packets that you have rinsed in bleach. To do this simply put some water in your sink, add 4 teaspoons of bleach for each litre of water in the sink, and dip the plastic bags in the sink.
- Double up the plastic bags - i.e. put one inside the other and place them on the disinfected counter.
- For food in waterproof packaging (such as tins or plastic bottles and tubs): Make a bleach solution (as above) in a spray bottle. Spray and wipe down each item before placing it in the disinfected bags
- For food that is not in waterproof packaging (bread, or pasta or rice in cardboard boxes, etc) wipe down the outside of the box with a little bit of hand sanitiser on a tissue
- For food that is not packaged (fresh fruit and veggies) simply rinse in warm water
- Make sure the items do not touch anything that is not disinfected before placing them in the plastic bags.
- Divide the food and supplies according the principle of one bag per person, or family. This is to make sure that the supplies do not have to be handled or reorganised in the neighbourhood you are delivering to.
- Carry the plastic bags with washed hands and without touching the inner bag - use the handles of the outer bag only
- Transport the supplies in a private car – remember that the car including door handles and the car interior should be sanitised. Do not use public transport as this can spread the virus. Do not use e-hailing services such as Uber to distribute food donations. This is not in line with the lockdown regulations, and could spread the virus.

- Wear a mask when delivering the supplies.

Distributing food

It is very important that food collection does not allow COVID-19 to spread within the recipient community. To achieve this:
- Sanitise or wash your hands before handling the plastic bags.
- Do not go into the person's home.
- Once again, only handle the outer packets.
- Stay 2 meters away from others, place the plastic bags on the ground or on a disinfected, outdoor surface if one is available.
- Let the person you are delivering to lift the inner packet that you have not handled. Once they are done, you can collect the outer packets.
- If possible, a representative from each family should come to collect a packet of supplies when you drop off. This is to prevent many people having to collect supplies from one home, which could spread infection.
- Make sure people collecting food keep 2 meters away from others. If people are queuing, make sure they stand at least 2 meters apart.
- Remind the person or people you are delivering to not to touch his or her face after handling the supplies, until they have washed their hands
- Include informational material in the food packages, such as pamphlets on handwashing, social distancing and using bleach to safely disinfect surfaces at home.

Shopping of those who need to self-isolate and the elderly

- Offer to buy groceries, do chores, or cook food for people who are self-isolating (especially the elderly).   One way to do this is to slip a note under their door giving a phone number they can call or text if they need help.
- In areas with communal water, you can organise to deliver water to the household.
- Make sure to keep a distance 2 meters between you and the recipient when delivering items.
- Wear a mask when dropping off food.
- Wash your hands before packing or dropping off food and other supplies.
- Use the double bag method described above.
- Check in on people regularly with phone calls, smses, or WhatsApp's.
- Remember not to touch the person, and to stay 2 meters away at all times.
- Set up a community kitchen to cook for people who are sick or self-isolating.
- Get a group of volunteers to do the cooking separately or in a sanitary environment, adhering to all safety codes.
- Wear a mask, wash your hands often and don't touch your face while cooking for others.
- Raise funds for buying groceries.

- Use the Street Leader approach. People should only deliver cooked food to community members living in their street.
- Only deliver food to people when it is absolutely essential.
- When it is essential to drop off food, remember not to touch the person you are delivering to. You can place the food on a surface for them and they can pick it up.

Assisting those who are being abused

- Ask community members and those delivering food parcels and aid to be vigilant about signs of gender-based violence and the abuse of children.
- Familiarise yourselves with the contact details for the SAPS FCS units in your area (Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences) along with NGOs focusing on preventing and combatting abuse.
- Distribute emergency contact details to be used in the case of abuse.
- Children often cannot report their own abuse so be particularly alert to signs that children are being harmed.
- Coordinate with local/ regional shelters for abuse victims.

Helping to get children schooled while the schools are closed

- Find out if there are children in your designated or paired area that are not being homeschooled during lockdown.
- Identify the reasons why they cannot be schooled. This could include, parents providing essential services, parents being illiterate (or not having completed their own schooling) and not able to assist, the children not having the books or text books they need during lockdown, lack of access to technology or to data to obtain online content.
- Problem solve with local resources (preferably educators and people involved in Early Childhood Development) about how to assist (options could include, printing and distributing schooling packs, data bundles, assisting children to access schoolwork being broadcast on radio or television or safely pairing children with an educator who can assist them with work that their parents cannot help with).

Characteristics of a CAN

A CAN should be action oriented, collaborative and focused on keeping volunteers safe at all times.

1. **Being action-oriented**
   - A CAN should not be a talk-shop.
   - Pick one thing that is achievable given the size and strength of your group and GET IT DONE.

2. **Being collaborative**
   - There may be groups and organisations already operating in your neighbourhood. Don't fragment, undermine or duplicate the efforts of another group.

- Ask around and look online to find any other active groups. Get in touch with them, introduce yourself and your committee. Find out what they have been doing, where you could collaborate, and what still needs to be done.
- Focus on filling the gaps in your community.
- Work with local government disaster management structures, NGOs, faith-based organisations, community leaders, schools and the business sector, including big and small food retailers.

3. **Keeping your group safe**
Safety should be the top priority of any activity. It is incredibly important that no members are placed at risk of contracting COVID-19, and that activities do not contribute to the spread of the coronavirus. Some basic principles to follow in this regard include:

- Follow official guidance and regulations at all times. This includes lockdown regulations.
- Meet online rather than in person.
- Make sure members have access to masks and handwash stations or hand sanitiser when engaging in activities.
- All members should monitor their own health closely.
- If you feel at all unwell, remove yourself immediately from all activities that involve leaving your home. Let your members know so they can arrange someone else to cover your duties. There is no shame in pulling back if you need to. You are doing the right thing and can continue to contribute to online activities.

The importance of social solidarity

While all CANs should be community-led, solidarity between other local CANs is important. Support other CANs whenever possible. This can mean financially or through food and other donations, but more often it means sharing your time, your emotional support, the lessons you have learnt and your informational resources with others.

For more information, contact
info@gautengtogether.org

* Information for this document was drawn from the Community Action Network starter pack, produced by Cape Town Together.