The Concept of Needs

Extension educational programs, based on the expressed and observed needs of people should be planned, developed, and conducted. These programs are successful when they focus on clearly defined needs of your targeted clientele.

The concept of needs has a variety of definitions and dimension. One of the simplest explanations is that a need is the difference, or gap, between what is and what should be (or what is reasonably possible).

\[
\text{WHAT IS} \quad \text{_____} \quad \text{(GAP)} \quad \text{_____} \quad \text{WHAT SHOULD BE} \\
\quad \text{(\rightarrow \quad \text{NEED} \quad \rightarrow)}
\]

As an educator, you are responsible for accurately assessing the needs of your clientele in collaboration with targeted audiences and community leaders. As you study the current situation (WHAT IS), you will easily observe some needs based on your own experiences and perceptions. As you work with community leaders and targeted audiences, those observed needs will be validated and other needs will be expressed. In developing your educational strategies, you should take into account both the observed and expressed needs.

It is important to remember that in nonformal education, people are motivated to participate when they feel a need for the information or training provided. If this need is not met satisfactorily, participation will diminish or cease. Thus, the astute extension educator offers educational experiences and presents information that meets the expressed or observed needs of the targeted audience.

To make an accurate needs assessment, you will need to conduct a thorough situational analysis in collaboration with community leaders and representatives of targeted audiences. Also, needs change, so needs analysis should be implemented as an ongoing component of your overall educational programming effort.

References:

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