

SECTION 1: FACILITATION (FAC) TOOLS

Section 1: Note to Users

These tools aim to help you to develop foundational skills such as listening, asking probing questions, managing conflict, and so on.

It is useful to engage with these tools before, during, and after the training workshop to prepare you for facilitation in a community-led approach. Extensive practice with reflection is needed in order to master the skills that these tools seek to develop.

The tools may be used individually or in small groups. This section enables individual reflection by providing space for reflective writing, using a workbook format. Each tool in this section requires 60–90 minutes to complete.

On an ongoing basis, it is useful to think about which skills you need additional practice on, which challenges (internal or external) make it difficult for you to use a particular skill, and how you will take steps to improve. In small groups, you may want to reflect with three to five colleagues, with group discussion of the questions posed in these tools and of what can be done to deepen particular skills within your agency.

FAC 1. Humility

Humility is the foundation for effective work by outsiders who wish to enable a community-led process. Without humility, we will not listen deeply because we think we know all the answers. Lacking in humility, we impose outsider approaches that are “better” than local practices. By placing ourselves above the community, we are not in a good position to build trust or an authentic relationship with the community. “We” (the NGO workers) are the experts, while “they” (the community members) are people who need to be educated, corrected, and guided by us and our agencies.

This tool invites you to reflect on why we should be humble, on the nature and importance of humility, and how a lack of humility by facilitators or outsiders can impede a community-led approach.

Grounds for Humility

A fair question for child protection workers is: “Why should we be humble?” After all, aren’t we (the outsiders) the experts on children’s protection?

To address this question, it can be useful to think about the limits of our knowledge and expertise. To begin with, child protection issues are so complex that they defy simple answers. Also, the field of child protection has a weak evidence base, and we have much to learn about which interventions are most effective, which elements of interventions do the “heavy lifting,” how to achieve sustainable positive outcomes for children, and so on. Adding to these concerns is the fact that NGO or other externally-enabled interventions on child protection sometimes cause unintended harm. In light of this complexity and these concerns, it would be unwise, even arrogant, to pump oneself up as an “expert.”

Next consider the knowledge that local communities may have. Think what things local people know that we do not know and jot down a few ideas.

Write below:

Did you notice that there are a dizzying number of things that local people know that we, as outsiders, do not know?

Local people understand local views of childhood and children, how children relate with extended family members, what community members expect of children and how expectations vary for girls and boys, how families and communities (and individual people) support children, what harms occur to children and who helps when these harms arise, among many others. Rural people have extensive knowledge about modes of livelihood such as farming, buying and selling goods, animal husbandry, etc. People in urban settings know about where to obtain basic supplies, what to buy or sell and where, and places their children should avoid, among others.

In both rural and urban settings, people have in-depth knowledge of cultural beliefs, values, and practices, and they know their oral histories and traditions. They know how to marshal local resources and develop local solutions to complex problems. This list, which could be extended for pages, indicates that local people have in-depth understanding of their context, their families and communities, and their children that outsiders do not have.

Humility should follow from this recognition that there is much that local people know that we do not. If we want an in-depth understanding of the context, we should set aside our mantle of being experts and instead see ourselves as students of local people. Now let's extend this spirit of humility by thinking further about different aspects of humility.

What is Humility?

Please circle each of the items below that you think best relate to humility or a humble approach in interacting with community people:

	loud	honest	arrogance
listening		angry	I'm an expert
funny		modest	narcissistic
	sad	I'm the center of attention	curious
liar		respectful	I'm here to serve

Line by line, the accurate responses are:

- **Honest:** A humble person has the ability to honestly and accurately assess his/her own knowledge/abilities and their limits.
- **Listening:** Humility leads one to listen rather than try to be the “expert.”
- **Modest:** Modesty is at the core of humility. A humble person is aware of what they do not know and cannot do and does not brag about or exaggerate their knowledge or ability.
- **Curious:** Being humble in relationships often goes with a sense of curiosity, which leads us to want to listen to and learn from others rather than promote ourselves.
- **Respectful:** Humility entails respecting others by, for example, not putting oneself above other people.
- **I’m here to serve:** A service orientation is central to humility. In community-led work, the orientation of the facilitator and the NGO should be: “It’s not about us but about the community—we are here to learn with and support them.”

This constellation of qualities is not seen in people who are arrogant, self-absorbed, and overconfident. Such people spend little time listening and a lot of time blowing their own horn, are unable to assess honestly their own abilities, and disrespect others by presenting themselves as better than everyone else. Usually, they have little orientation toward service per se.

Why a Humble Approach is Important

Thinking about your work as a facilitator or an NGO worker, please take a few minutes to write down several ideas about the value of a humble approach in enabling community-led work on child protection. In other words, why is humility important with regard to community-led work?

Write below:

Did you consider how humility is important for enabling learning? People are less likely to speak openly if they feel that they are being judged or that the outsiders somehow consider themselves to be more knowledgeable.

A humble approach helps to manage the power asymmetry between the community and the NGO and invites the community to be in the driver's seat. If we adopt a humble approach of listening and being there to serve the community, we build deeper relationships with the people. Also, when local people see that the focus is on them and what they themselves can do, there will likely be greater agency on the part of the community and less dependency on outsiders.

Now reflect for a moment on the problems associated with an approach that lacks humility. Imagine that you are a parent, and an international NGO has come to your own community and wants to promote effective parenting. They announce that they are "experts" and have learned from many countries what makes the most effective parenting. Yet you notice that they are from a different place or ethnic group and do not speak your native language. You also notice that they have apparently not bothered to talk with people in your community. They want to teach people a new approach to parenting and invite you to come to their educational session.

How would you likely feel in this situation? Does this approach help the community to mobilize itself around strengthening parenting practices? Why or why not?

Write below:

Developing a More Humble Approach

To develop a more humble approach, it can be useful for you to reflect on the following questions and to write on each for a couple of minutes. Be honest, taking care to avoid the tendency that most of us have to present ourselves in a positive light. At the same time, avoid being so unswervingly critical that it becomes impossible to see the positives in your approach.

- What are my motives for doing child protection work? Aside from wanting to help children, are there personal benefits that I derive from this work and being an "expert"?

Write below:

- In what ways are my personal approach and work with communities respectful and humble? In what ways are they less than respectful and humble?

write below:

- Do local people see me as an equal, or do they see me as placing myself above them?

write below:

- When I'm in the community, does my mode of dress, introduction, speaking, and even travel put me in an elevated position relative to community people?

write below:

- How trustful am I of community processes with regard to supporting vulnerable children?

write below:

- How willing am I to share power with communities? Do I or my agency make the key decisions, or do communities make the key decisions?

write below:

- When I talk with communities, is the focus on me and my agency, or on the community?
Are there ways in which I may be putting myself too much at the center?

Write below:

Developing a humble approach is not a one-step process but is part of a longer journey of self-awareness and transformation. On an ongoing basis, it pays to reflect on the humility of your current approach, taking time to write anew on the questions in this section.

FAC 2. What Do I Bring to the Community?

Note: Users of this tool may want to adapt the Afghanistan example (which pertains to a Muslim country) to their own context or geographic region. For example, participants in the Middle East might use Iraq as the example, or participants in Africa might use the example of Somalia.

To engage deeply with communities and develop a reflective practice, we first need to become aware of what we each bring psychologically to the community. Each humanitarian worker enters the community with a host of assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, values, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors, and these shape the ways in which we engage with community people and in turn are seen by local people. Depending on our orientation, what we bring can build trust and relationships, or it can put people off or marginalize them.

This tool aims to help you think through what you bring and to reflect on the implications of this and how you present yourself in interactions with community people. We start with an example of a hypothetical child protection worker from another country who is entering a community on behalf of an NGO.

Example: What an International Child Protection Worker is Likely to Bring to Afghanistan

John is a 35-year-old child protection worker who holds a master's degree in Social Work from the prestigious Johns-Hopkins University. Born and raised in Iowa (in the mid-US) and living now in New York City, John is a fervent Christian yet respects other people's faiths. As a child protection specialist for an international NGO named "Well Child," he is passionate about child rights. He has worked in several countries outside the US but has never visited Asia.

John has been assigned by Well Child to visit Northern Afghanistan in 2004 to support national Afghan teams who have been working in rural villages and who are well respected. John has learned from the national staff that girl suicide has sharply increased in the area since more girls are being forced to get married at young ages (mostly 15–16 years of age) to much older men whom they do not like.

The international office of Well Child appreciates John's expertise in mental health and psychosocial issues and has asked him to visit some villages in order to help learn about the situation and help develop an intervention that could improve the mental health and psychosocial well-being of girls in the area.

Using the space below, take five minutes to list out some of the main things that John likely brings to this task. These can be positive or negative. You may want to think about things like his background and likely beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, values, etc. Since you do not know John, you will need to speculate a bit in doing this and list at least two things for each category.

Write below:

POSITIVE: _____

NEGATIVE: _____

Now take a couple of minutes to think how these might mesh or not mesh with beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. in rural villages in northern Afghanistan. Please write down below a couple of key points. (Or, if you are in a group, this could be a topic for group discussion.)

Write below:

Next, reflect for a moment on the likely power dynamics associated with John's entry into the villages. How is John positioned in regard to power relative to the villagers? How are the villagers positioned relative to John?

Write below:

Here are some important points related to the preceding example:

What John brings. John brings his American background and identity, which can have significant implications in Afghanistan, particularly since in 2004, US troops were fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan and were also occupying Iraq. He also brings his Christian background and orientation with him, which potentially clashes with Afghans' fervent Muslim faith, identity, and practice. With respect to beliefs and assumptions, John likely believes that men and women are equal or ought to be equal, and he may believe that forced early marriage is a violation of children's rights. He probably assumes that 15- and 16-year-old girls are children and therefore ought to be protected and that girls should be able to make their own decisions, without coercion.

From his studies, he knows that forced early marriage can harm girls' mental health and psychosocial well-being as well as their physical health. He likely assumes that to some extent, his understanding of mental health and human relationships applies in Afghanistan. He also knows that since forced marriage violates girls' rights, it has to be stopped. Understanding the importance of case management, he likely thinks about how to identify girls at risk and how to support them and prevent suicide. Also, his child protection knowledge may lead him to see forced marriage as both a child protection issue and a mental health issue.

John's attitudes, values, and expectations about the issue of forced early marriages are very likely not neutral. Like most child protection workers, he probably sees forced early marriage as repugnant, highly harmful to girls, and as something that needs urgently to be stopped or prevented. Although he may have a positive attitude toward individual Afghan people or families, he probably views Afghan gender norms with disdain, seeing them as supporting the mistreatment of and discrimination against girls and women. Being a Christian, he values helping, compassion, and individual dignity, and he sees suicide as wrong.

John's expectations are that with some analysis, explanation, and appropriate intervention, local people will see the girls' suicides as a serious problem and will work with Well Child to prevent it. He may also expect that he, being the expert, should design the indicated intervention for addressing the problem in a manner that fits with international standards on child protection and mental health and psychosocial support. Being an experienced child protection worker, though, he expects long term change in social norms will occur slowly. Guided by his role within Well Child, he acts in a professional manner and asks questions that aim to clarify the scale and causes of the problem, and he analyzes with the Afghan staff what could be done to address the problem.

Power. Relative to poor Afghan villagers, John is quite wealthy. Also, he works for an international NGO that people likely see as wealthy and powerful, and he probably entered villages in an expensive vehicle that local people could not possibly afford. Having been educated in a Western university, holding a graduate degree, and designated as a child protection specialist, John holds power related to knowledge and technical expertise. Most likely, he would be seen by Afghan villagers as bringing Western science to their communities. Further, he is male, and Afghan social norms privilege men over women. For all these reasons, John holds and will likely be seen by Afghan people as powerful, and they may allow him to impose outside ideas that may fit poorly within the Afghan context. Even if he is humble in his approach, local people see his power and may keep silent about any doubts they have about his approach.

Congruence. There is likely at least some partial agreement or congruence between John’s views and the communities’ views. For example, both likely view the girls’ suicides as horrible and want to prevent them. However, the points of divergence may be much greater than are the points of convergence. Rural villagers in Afghanistan do not view 15- and 16-year-old girls as children but as adults who are marriageable, and the villagers will probably not be supporters of universal child rights. Also, community people will likely not see the girls’ marriages to older men as problematic but as an acceptable practice that fits Afghan norms and the economic realities of their families’ situation. They may also believe that a girl’s primary responsibility is to obey her parents and set aside her own wishes in favor of the greater good for the family.

Although they might be reluctant to say so directly, the villagers may not like the idea of Well Child trying to stop and prevent the families from marrying their daughters off before 18 years of age. Indeed, they may fear that it will bring too many Western approaches and Christian ideas that could weaken children’s Muslim values, identity, and practices. These and related concerns could make it difficult for community members to form a deep, trustful relationship with Well Child staff. In turn, Well Child staff such as John may be reluctant to enable community-driven action out of concern that the villages would pursue practices that are harmful to the girls.

Personal Analysis and Reflection

Having done this kind of analysis and reflection with John, our hypothetical child protection worker, it is time now to repeat the process with yourself in mind. Please picture yourself in your role as a child protection worker—or, if you are not a child protection worker, imagine yourself as being one for the moment. Assume that your organization or agency has asked you to work in a country or area that is new to you and to help to address violence against children. Using the space below, write in a couple of points for each item, outlining your background/origin, beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, etc.

Write below:

Background/origin: _____

Beliefs: _____

Assumptions: _____

Knowledge: _____

Please take a couple of minutes to think how these might mesh or not mesh with beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. in the area you have envisioned. Please write down below a couple of key points. (Or, if you are in a group, this could be a topic for group discussion.)

Write below:

Now reflect for a moment on the likely power dynamics associated with your entry into the area. How are you positioned in regard to power relative to the local people? How are the local people positioned relative to you?

Write below:

Please reflect for a few minutes on how well or poorly what you bring to the community meshes with the views of local people. Jot down some key areas of possible overlap and also of possible disconnects.

Write below:

Perhaps most important, now take about 10 minutes to write out some key ideas about how what you bring to the community may affect (positively or negatively) efforts to build trust and a strong relationship with the community. Please write out some key reflections or discuss them with colleagues in a small group. Be sure to think about issues of power and imposition of outsider definitions, knowledge, values, and approaches.

Write below:

Last, take 10 minutes to reflect on and write down some of the things you could do to reduce the negative effects of what you bring to communities.

Write below:

Did you think of things such as the items below?

- Backgrounding your knowledge, values, and expectations: You cannot literally step out of your beliefs, values, assumptions, etc., but you can move them into the background of your mind and action. Rather than leading with your expertise, pretend that you are a student of a new people and place, about which you know very little. Be focused on the local people and learning from them, without judging them.
- Manage the power differential: Dress down and in ways that do not put you above local people. Avoid using technical language or introducing yourself in formal ways (e.g., by using your title). Can you think of other ways?
- Be aware of and reflect regularly on your nonverbal behavior. For example, do you wince or become too quiet when you observe a situation that is customary for local people but that you regard as discrimination against women?

- Use the language and terms of local people rather than using the technical vocabulary of outsiders.
- Work carefully with the translator in advance to help them aim for verbatim translation, without inserting their own words or views?
- Consider the possibility of sending someone else who can speak the local language, build trust quickly, and obtain accurate information?

The tools that follow outline additional strategies that can help you reduce the negative effects and also maximize the positive effects of what you bring to the community.

FAC 3. Deep Listening

Listening is key for communicating and developing relationships with other people. Yet in everyday life, good listening can be quite rare. For one thing, we have many distractions and time pressures that make it difficult to listen. We may be so immersed in our smart phones or electronic devices, for example, that we may miss what other people say or not even hear when someone speaks to us. Or, feeling rushed, we may hear the words someone says and give a superficial response yet fail to understand their feelings or the meanings behind their words.

Fortunately, we also have the capacity to learn to listen in a deeper, more engaged manner, although this requires both effort and practice. The purpose of this tool is to stimulate reflection on what is good listening, its importance in the community facilitation process, and the obstacles to it. Also, the tool will help to identify steps or practices that will enable you to listen more deeply and to use these skills in your work as a facilitator.

What is Deep Listening?

Let's begin with everyday life. Thinking about yourself, your friends and family, and your daily activities, please take five full minutes to jot down what you think good listening is and why it is important.

Write below:

When you have finished, please flip to the next page.

In regard to good listening, did you identify or consider the following qualities?

- **Active:** Is not casual or passive but is energetic and probes for full understanding.
- **Attentive:** Pays full attention to what the other person is saying and communicates this nonverbally (e.g., through friendly eye contact where that is regarded as respectful, recognizing that avoiding direct eye contact is respectful in some contexts) as well as verbally by saying things such as “um-hm,” or “okay,” to signal one is following what is being said.
- **Open:** Eager to hear the other person’s ideas.
- **Respectful:** Avoids judging, arguing, or cutting the other person off.
- **Empathic:** Tries to put oneself in the position of the speaker, “walking a mile in the other person’s shoes.”
- **Caring:** Shows concern and care for the speaker’s feelings and well-being.
- **Adjusting to the speaker:** Adapts to the individual speaker, without forcing them to talk or to change their tempo, content, manner of expression, etc. This also involves being comfortable with silences.
- **Thankful:** Communicates appreciation and gratitude for the other person sharing their thoughts and feelings and taking time to talk.

Why Deep Listening Is Important

Deep listening has both practical and relational benefits. On the practical side, listening enables us to learn from what other people say, to work together to solve a problem, or to address situations such as being lost by asking directions and listening to and following them. Thus, good listening is part of human development, problem-solving, and even meeting our survival and protection needs.

Deep listening also plays a key role in developing and maintaining quality relationships. Deep listening enables the communication that is essential to our lives as social beings. Through listening, we learn about others’ thoughts, feelings, and subjective worlds, and we demonstrate the receptivity, respect, and caring that help to build positive relationships. Our attentive, respectful listening to others typically makes them feel affirmed and validated as people. Because they experience our attention as supportive and positive, they are likely to reciprocate by being respectful and attentive to us.

Nothing is more disrespectful or damaging to a relationship than speaking to someone only to have them pay no attention to you or your feelings. Also, if conflicts or divergences arise, listening to each other’s feelings is a valuable means of learning and handling the conflict in a constructive manner.

Applications to the Facilitation Process

Now think how deep listening contributes to the community facilitation process. Please take a couple of minutes to jot down below your initial ideas on this.

Write below:

Did you consider the importance of listening in regard to some of the main functions of facilitators in a community-led process? Some key points are outlined below.

- **Building trust and relationship:** A good facilitator establishes a sense of trust and relationship with many different people in the community. To do this, the facilitator listens well to different people, thereby demonstrating respect, care, and empathy, without judging or arguing with people.
- **Learning deeply about communities:** The facilitator needs to learn about diverse views within a community and about power relations and how people are situated. The facilitator does this in no small part by deep listening, which enables learning not only about what people think but also about their underlying values, feelings, and culture.
- **Enabling inclusive dialogue:** To help communities decide which harm to children they want to address, how to address it, etc., the facilitator must help to bring in the views of many different people and to ensure that no one is excluded due to gender, age, class, caste, ability, status, religion, or other source of difference. To help different people contribute their views, the facilitator must learn about the different views by listening and trying to make each person feel comfortable sharing her or his ideas, without tacitly or explicitly taking sides. The latter requires not only showing appreciation for different ideas but listening to people's concerns and feelings, their ideas about how it might be possible to speak openly, and being attentive to social norms and power relations.
- **Supporting collaborative problem-solving:** The facilitator works with community members to help them solve problems such as, "Which harm to children should be addressed?" and, "How could the community address that particular harm to children?" The process of collective problem-solving is organically connected to the process of inclusive dialogue. This entails intensive listening by the facilitator not only to which

harms to children or approaches to addressing them are discussed but also to who is discussing them and how they are discussed, with attention as well to who is not participating in the dialogues.

- **Enabling community ownership:** The facilitator works tirelessly to keep power concentrated in the hands of the community and to have all aspects of the process led and owned by the community. This requires careful listening for signs of community ownership or lack thereof. For example, if the facilitator heard people say, “This is really just another NGO project” or, “The discussions are dominated by the Chief and his family,” that would be a sign of low levels of community ownership and participation. Conversely, if people spoke consistently of the process as “our” way of supporting children, that would indicate a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Enabling Deep Listening

Deep listening is not just something that happens—it is a product of intentional steps and processes of self-awareness and self-management. Please think for a couple of minutes and then write down three key steps that you could take to listen more deeply.

Write below:

There are many steps that one can take to become a better listener—even simple things such as turning off one’s phones and tablets while talking to someone can help to enable deep listening. Three broader steps are creating space, being fully present, and being curious.

Creating Space

A monk on the Thai-Burma border stated:

There is a responsibility for foreigners to quiet their voice. Calm down and visit and get to know the people. Don't run in with your own agenda.¹

The same wisdom applies not only to foreigners but to anyone who works on child protection at community level.

Not much listening can happen if we are talking constantly, excitedly discussing our ideas and approaches. In communities, we need to create space for listening by being quieter than most people usually are and deliberately focusing on listening. In turn, this requires slowing down and breaking from the fast tempo to which we may have become accustomed.

Not talking so much also communicates that it is not about us but about the community—we are there to listen to and work with community members. At heart, what community members say and do is more important than what we say or do. This inversion of the typical focus on NGO voice and action is at the heart of keeping communities at the center.

Creating space for listening is also important in enabling constructive dialogues in the community. Imagine a group discussion in which the facilitator is designated by F, and the participants by P1, P2, and so on.

F: What do you see as the main harms to children here?

P1: Well, there are children who don't go to school and who gamble and steal.

F: Ok, so there are children engaged in bad behavior and are in conflict with the law. What are some other ideas?

P2: The biggest harm here is heavy work. You see boys even 9 years old carrying heavy rocks and working in the mines.

F: Thanks for that—this problem is one of child labor, right? And in this case, it's dangerous labor since the mines are unsafe.

¹ From p. 7 of Anderson, M., Brown, D., & Jean, I. (2012). *Time to listen: Hearing people on the receiving end of international aid*. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

What do you see the facilitator doing wrong here?

Write below:

In this discussion, the facilitator is doing little listening. Without thinking much about what people are saying, he inserts formal child protection vocabulary for the harms the participants suggest. Also, he makes inferences about children being in conflict with the law and about the mines being unsafe. By inserting his own categories and inferences, he has tacitly asserted his expertise and the priority of his vocabulary, thereby marginalizing what community members think. Deeper listening could have been achieved by creating space for community members to say more and explain their ideas fully. For example, the facilitator could have asked what the gambling and stealing consist of, why they may do such things, etc. These probing questions open up space for the community members to explore their ideas more fully. This manner of active, engaged listening sets a good model and can help community members to use a similar process with each other.

Being Fully Present

Having space for listening does not by itself guarantee deep listening—we have to be motivated, ready, and able to listen. If our minds are racing with thoughts about how a report is overdue, what we will do after work, or how we fear not doing well as facilitators, we will not be in a good position to listen since our minds are somewhere else and are filled with other things. If our minds are like nonstop radios that present a steady stream of inner voices and ideas, it will be challenging to listen deeply to other people.

Numerous strategies exist for clearing your mind and enabling yourself to listen deeply. One is to move all the things you had been thinking of into the background so you are not consciously thinking about them. Or you could quiet your mind by meditating for a time, which often entails sitting quietly and observing thoughts and images as they occur but without picking up or focusing on them. After a few minutes, your mind achieves a relaxed state in which it does not attach itself to particular ideas. Staying in this state for fifteen or twenty minutes can help one to feel quiet, rested, and attentive.

Perhaps the most essential strategy, though, is to prioritize listening. To be a good listener, you have to make it a very high priority to listen fully and empathically to someone. Being highly motivated, you change your orientation away from being an “expert” to that of a learner who is

keenly interested in learning as much as possible from this person's words, experiences, views, etc.

It is a bit like being a student, with the community people being the teachers. If you really want to learn about other people's views, it becomes possible to listen deeply with gratitude and without judgment.

Being fully present and listening deeply requires ongoing self-monitoring and adjustment. For example, I may really want to listen to a particular grandmother and learn as much as possible about her views. Yet I may be so tired that I lack the patience and mental capacity required for deep listening, or thoughts about needing to get home may intrude. Catching myself not listening fully can help me to make needed adjustments.

For example, even though I am tired, I might remind myself of my goal to be a really good listener and that this grandmother has amazing life experience and wisdom to draw upon. Having boosted my motivation, I sharpen my focus on her, breathe more deeply to keep my mind alert, and bring myself fully into the present and the task of listening. In this way, self-monitoring and self-management go hand in hand.

Curiosity, too, plays a significant role in deep listening. In a community-led process, the facilitator seeks to learn as much as possible about other people's views and why they hold them. When a community member agrees to talk with us, we have a remarkable opportunity to learn deeply. We do this by listening, asking additional questions that invite the person to go deeper and explain more fully, or asking new questions that help us to learn about other aspects of the person's thinking about children. We follow the participant yet we are guided by our curiosity, which keeps us fresh and eager to learn. From this standpoint, listening becomes a pleasure, and we communicate this tacitly to the people we talk with.

This spirit of appreciative learning is at the heart of being a good facilitator, and it in turn motivates community people to form a relationship with us, trust us, and open up about their views, values, and practices. Appreciative learning is a reciprocal process as, over time, relationships deepen, more rich ideas are shared, and community members become appreciative of how we feed back what we have learned. When we listen deeply, the door opens.

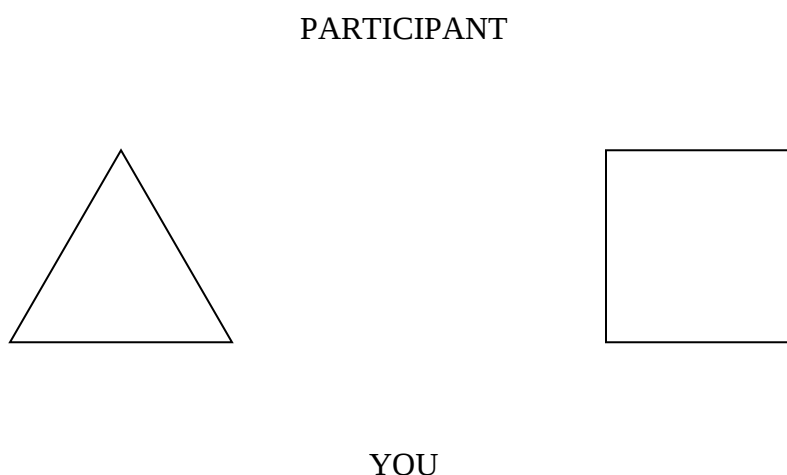
FAC 4. Empathy

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. defined empathy as the ability “to walk a mile in another person's shoes.” Empathy differs from sympathy, in which we accept or support another person’s feelings as our own. In empathizing, we do not agree or disagree with the other person’s feelings, ideas, or views. Instead, we try to put ourselves in the other person’s position and understand fully how they see things.

Being able to empathize with someone requires that we be curious about another person’s perspective and seek to learn as much as we can about it, without judging. This requires being open to new perspectives so that we do not see things through our own lenses. In a significant way, we have to background our own ways of understanding, adopting instead the viewpoint of the other person as closely as we can.

A Visual Example

A visual task can illustrate what it means to empathize with the view of another person. Imagine you are seated at a table looking across at another person (participant), as below. On the table are two figures. Which one is on the participant’s left?



Most people figure out that the square is on the participant’s left. How does one come up with the correct answer? Often, people do this through a process of position-taking (empathy) that involves visual imagery. They imagine themselves sitting in the position of the participant, and then they look to see the imagined objects in front of them. Seeing both in their mind’s eye, they then name the object that is on the left.

An interesting feature of this task is that it requires getting out of one's own perspective. Indeed, if you fixate on how you see things (with the triangle on your left), it becomes very challenging to see things from the standpoint of the participant. We have to background or let go of our own position and views in order to see things from the participant's point of view. This is always true of empathy—it is a process of not privileging our own position and views but of moving into a different space where we go as far as possible in seeing things from the participant's perspective.

Yet the task above is artificial and highly unusual in that we can see the same objects that the participant sees. This ability to see exactly what the participant sees is seldom the case in real life, where the participant has life experiences that we cannot immediately see or apprehend. As a visual metaphor, the situation below is perhaps more accurate.



Here, the participant sees three particular things—a wavy line with arrows on both ends, a circle with a diagonal line, and a single, tilted braces symbol. However, a barrier between you prevents you from seeing what the participant sees. You can learn about what the participant sees only through a verbal exchange. The objects happen to be difficult to describe precisely, in the same way that one's personal experiences and beliefs can be difficult to put into words.

In this context, if you want to know what the participant sees, you have only one way of finding out—you have to ask and rely on what the participant says. As the participant speaks, you will find yourself making inferences based on what she says and then asking probing questions to obtain clarification and sharpen your idea of what she likely sees.

A Verbal Example

Read the following statement, trying to empathize as fully as possible with the mother who is speaking.

For me, the worst part of the war was not the shelling, attacks, and losses but the constant hunger and threat of starvation. Hunger never left me alone, and even at night, I dreamt of food only to wake up feeling so hungry! But the hunger was not mine alone—my family was starving. Can you imagine my suffering on thinking that my two daughters might starve to death?

Now imagine you are this mother. Empathizing with her, think how she suffered during the war and jot down your understanding of her suffering.

Write below:

Did you capture the relational nature of her suffering? Outsiders from relatively individualistic societies tend to focus on individual suffering, whereas people from more collectivist societies frequently emphasize the relational aspects of suffering. This relational perspective was evident in her concern over the possibility that her daughters might starve to death.

Challenges to Empathy

Among the diverse challenges to empathy, one of the most prevalent is our tendency to cling to our own preconceptions and to impose our own values. For example, a child protection specialist who encounters a young teenage boy living on the streets in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia might begin asking a string of questions, resulting in the following exchange:

CP worker: “Where do you sleep at night?”

Boy: “I sleep in next to that building (pointing) where it’s warm at night.”

CP worker: “Are any family members here with you?”

Boy: “No, I’m here by myself and have friends.”

CP worker: “Are you in contact with your parents?”

Please reflect on this mode of questioning and whether you think it is a useful means of empathizing with the boy's perspective.

Write below:

Did you notice that the questions reflected the child protection worker's agenda and assumptions more than a desire to empathize with the boy's views and situation? The assumption behind these questions is that living in the care of one's parents and family is preferable to living on the streets.

But what if the teenager had been abused by his family and wanted nothing to do with them? Perhaps he likes being on his own and living on the streets where there is excitement and freedom from adult-imposed activities such as going to school.

So we can see that, when we start with our own agenda, we do not get very far in empathizing. Also, the questions asked could lead the other person to perceive the questions as being disrespectful. Or he might see the questions as reflecting the views of authorities, whom he wants to avoid. This perception could cause him to cut off the discussion or to be so guarded in his answers as to make empathic learning impossible.

Empathy also becomes challenging when we encounter beliefs very different from our own. For example, if a former girl soldier in Sierra Leone says, "I carry bad spirits from the bush," it might be hard to empathize fully since we may not understand what it means to carry bad spirits from the bush. In rural Sierra Leone, this can mean that as a soldier who had been around dead people in the bush, one has been contaminated by the spirits of the dead, who not only haunt but can cause significant problems such as bad health.

Without understanding the context and the local belief system, empathy does not come at once but occurs slowly through a process of respectful listening and asking probing questions.

Empathy becomes even more difficult when the views you are empathizing with threaten your own values and ways of being in the world. For example, assume you are a well-intentioned humanitarian worker who devotes their life to encouraging child rights. Yet you encounter a father who explains that he disciplines his children by beating them, following the local customs.

This can be very difficult to learn about since it clearly upsets you. Even if you listen, it may be difficult to probe on and learn more about it without flinching or even challenging what you see as a harmful practice. It takes practice to be able to background your own views and to keep the emphasis on learning about local views.

The best way of managing these challenges is to reflect regularly on questions such as these:

- How am I taking an empathic approach in my interactions?
- Am I asking questions or saying things that reflect my agenda and values that may create obstacles to empathy?
- When I hear things that are troubling or that anger me, am I able to move those feelings into the background so that I am not focusing on them and focus instead on the tasks of empathizing and learning?
- What are my personal obstacles to empathizing, and what steps am I taking to improve my ability to empathize more fully with other people?

Please continue this tool by turning to the following page.

Practical Exercise (to be done with a partner)

Goal: The goal of this exercise is to empathize with another person's views on how to improve education in his or her country.

Participants: You and a colleague or friend who alternate as interviewer and participant

Materials: Watch or other means of keeping time

Time: 45 minutes

Process:

- For the first 15 minutes, you are the interviewer who will try to learn as deeply as possible about the participant's views on how to improve education in the country (or some other topic of choice), preferably one that you have not previously discussed together. Your task is to listen fully and respectfully, avoid judging or arguing, and ask probing questions that help you understand as fully as possible the other person's views. Stop briefly for one minute after 5, 10, and 15 minutes to summarize back to the participant what you understand to be their view.
- For 5 minutes, have the participant reflect out loud on how they felt during the process. In particular, did he or she feel judged? Did they feel their views were understood or not understood? Were there other areas that could have been probed? Were the probing questions the right ones or were there others that might have been asked? Since this is a joint reflection, also note how you felt—did you find yourself disagreeing or wanting to argue or inject your own views? What did you do when that happened?
- Now reverse the roles, this time with you as the participant and your colleague as the person who seeks to learn about your views on the same topic. Ask them to avoid judging or arguing and to focus on drawing you out and learning about your views. As before, stop briefly for one minute after 5, 10, and 15 minutes to enable the interviewer to summarize back to you what they understand to be your view.
- For 5 minutes, reflect together on these questions: How did you experience this process—was it supportive, or was it hostile and threatening? Was this an enjoyable process for you? How does it make you feel when another person has listened carefully to you?
- Thank your colleague or friend for his or her time.
- By yourself, sit, relax, and compose your mind, taking a few deep breaths and focusing on them as a means of quieting your thoughts and becoming ready to think clearly and reflect in an honest, open manner. Based on this experience, what do you think you need to do more or less of as a means of empathizing with other people?

FAC 5. Developing a Reflective Practice

Being a good facilitator requires many skills—empathy, listening, building trust, promoting useful dialogue, analyzing the ethical course of action, and so on. Being a good facilitator, though, does not mean that one has mastered all these skills and has somehow “arrived” as a master facilitator. Over time, the context, the issues, the actors, and relationships change, introducing new complexities that may require ongoing learning and adjustment.

As the context changes, for example, one might find that something that had worked well previously no longer works very well. Or, doing things in the old way is suddenly seen by local people as not helpful. In this respect, the facilitator is on an ongoing journey of learning and can never sit back and rest assured that everything is going fine.

In fact, one of the most important skills of facilitation is that of critical thinking, which aims to help strengthen practice. This consists of two important processes: critical reflection and using what is learned through reflection to strengthen one’s practice.

Critical reflection means stepping back from a task and taking stock of how it is going and of what might need adjustment. It is related to self-awareness, yet self-awareness is only part of it.

The second process is using what is learned to guide improvements in one’s work and practice, including improvements in one’s own behavior, demeanor, and relationships with local people. In this regard, the aim of reflection is not to tear things down and criticize harshly but to learn from our mistakes and take steps to facilitate in a more effective manner. Done over time in an authentic, learning-oriented manner, the reflective approach to practice can move one from being an average facilitator to being a consistently excellent facilitator.

Creating Space for Reflection

Because facilitating community-led action entails so many activities, it is easy to slip into a mode of work best described as “doing-doing-doing.” We slip into this mode readily because our work is dynamic and complex, seldom asking questions such as: “Is this the most effective or appropriate way?” We may even joke with ourselves or friends by saying, “There’s no time to think!” When this happens, we risk doing things in ways that are less than effective or even making the same mistakes repeatedly.

An important step toward developing a reflective practice is to create space for reflection each day in a context that is relatively quiet and conducive to looking back and thinking how to improve.

A simple way of doing this is to sit in a particular chair for 10 minutes a day specifically for purposes of reflection (some people prefer a quiet walk without distractions or interruptions).

Creating the space, though, refers also to having psychological space. If we sit for ten minutes with our minds racing, our thoughts will crowd out reflection. A useful way to begin, then is by asking a very simple question:

- How am I right now? Are my thoughts racing, or am I ready to reflect on how I did today?

If your thoughts are racing, it is useful to pay full attention to your breathing until your mind is quiet and you are ready to reflect.

Thinking Back, Asking Questions, and Reflecting

Now think back on today. For a moment, think of two things that went well in working with the community. These could be as simple as conversations you observed or helped to facilitate. Ask yourself, “How were they good?” and, “How did I support them or not interrupt them?”

Next, think of one or two things that did not go so well. Maybe two or three people dominated a discussion when twelve people were present. Maybe girls and women participated well, but men did not get involved. Or an argument erupted and you felt uncertain what to do.

In reflecting on one of the things that did not go well, ask yourself, “Why did this likely happen?”, recognizing that you may not have the complete answer. Pay particular attention to whether something you did or did not do may have contributed to the situation. Then ask, “What could I do differently to help address this challenge or to avoid it from happening again in the future?” Jot down a couple of notes in response to each question.

Why did this happen? _____

What could I do differently? _____

Often when you reflect on why things happened, you may see that there are things that relate to what you did or did not do. If men were not getting involved, maybe it was because the idea for the discussions came from girls and women, who were highly excited and did not take time to ask whether it would be useful to bring men into the discussions. Or, thinking back, you might realize that it was okay for girls and women to talk among themselves first and that it is the next logical step to invite them to reflect on whether, when, and how men could be engaged as well.

The point is, now you are no longer doing things robotically—you are stepping back daily, reflecting on what happened, and identifying possible ways for improving your facilitation and the community process.

In reflecting, it is useful to think about important questions, looking back over a time period of several days or weeks. Some useful questions that relate to you, your role, and your relationships with community people:

- How do community people see me? Do females see me differently than do males, and why?
- Is my behavior, dress, and demeanor appropriate for different people in the community—elders, girls, women, men, boys?
- How do children see me? Am I enabling enough participation by girls and by boys? Is that upsetting the power balance in the community?
- Who is doing the organizing at community level and the center of action—is it community people or me?
- How am I as a facilitator? What are my strengths and weaknesses as a facilitator? Am I more like a guide and is that appropriate?
- Thinking back to the ethical issues discussed in the training workshop, how am I doing? What are the challenges and what do I need to do differently?
- Is the community process inclusive enough? What could I do to enable people to take an even more inclusive approach?

Take a few moments and write a reflection for today, with one or more of the above questions in mind.

Write below:

In reflecting on these and other questions you can think of, it is natural not to find definite answers in any one reflection session. Today, you may think that the community process is highly inclusive and you don't need to adjust much in regard to how you facilitate inclusivity. Yet, having reflected on that, you may be more likely to look carefully tomorrow at how inclusive the community process actually is. One of the greatest benefits of reflection is its ability to raise questions that then invite you to see things in a new light or to probe further in

your thinking. In this sense, honest reflection is an excellent stimulus for learning and for making improvements.

Reflecting Together with a Mentor

Some of the most valuable reflection is done jointly with a trusted other. Reflecting together with a mentor, for example, enables you to check your ideas and views and to benefit from the perspective of an experienced, supportive other person who has greater life experience and deep powers of observation and reflection.

Not infrequently, a mentor can help to increase the accuracy of your own self-assessments. A facilitator, for example, might think that the community has a highly inclusive process, whereas the mentor might be able to point out the various people who are not included. This observation by the mentor is not intended to tear down the facilitator but to remind them that there is still a lot of work to do to enable a fully participatory, inclusive process. Also, mentors can sometimes help to moderate our views of our own shortcomings or things we think we need to work on.

For example, a facilitator might say that they are really bad at managing heated arguments because they get very tense and doesn't know what to say. Yet a mentor who has seen them in action in such a situation may be able to comment that their nervousness doesn't show and the things they said were helpful in the following respects, which are then explained. Thus a mentor can provide a check on accuracy and also avoid the tendency to dwell on one's mistakes. The adage that "we learn as much from our mistakes as from our successes" is useful in regard to facilitation.

Reflecting together with a mentor is also useful in thinking through options for handling challenging situations. Having greater life experience, a mentor can often help to identify options that a younger facilitator may not have considered, or may offer suggestions about implementing options in a way that most people are likely to see as respectful and appropriate.

Last but not least, a more experienced mentor can offer support for you as a human being working under challenging circumstances. An experienced mentor can help you take stock of whether you are working too hard, taking enough time for yourself, and achieving the balance that enables the equanimity and openness of a skilled facilitator.

Becoming a Reflexive Practitioner

The essential first step is to accept your responsibility for becoming a reflexive practitioner. Next is to set aside ten minutes for this every day, engaging in the activities suggested above and being authentic with yourself rather than praising or denigrating everything you do as a facilitator. Perhaps most important is to use the reflective process as a means of doing a better job as facilitator. Finding enjoyment and insight in this process will make reflection something to look forward to—it is, after all, your time. And it will help you to intermix doing and thinking in a powerful, enriching way that helps to achieve your goal of being an effective facilitator.

FAC 6. Asking Probing Questions

Probing questions are open-ended questions that invite the participant to provide additional information about what they have said or implied. Probing questions may vary by context but often include items such as, “Could you please say more about that?”, or “Could you please give an example to help me understand what you mean?” Asking such questions sounds simple enough, but in fact the systematic use of probing questions entails a different way of working and requires new skills.

Probing questions are among the most important tools for any facilitator (or learner) since they enable empathic learning about the participant’s views, values, and feelings in regard to a particular topic. Probing questions are key in learning about participants’ views about harms to children, possible actions for addressing those harms, how to implement an action in a community-led manner, and how to evaluate the community action. Thus, probing questions are relevant to facilitators’ work in all phases of a community-led process.

Orientation of the Listener

In interviews or group discussions, facilitators, and also data collectors, frequently feel that they have to follow a pre-defined script. This tendency is particularly visible in data collectors who have been trained to adhere to a research protocol and standardize the administration of questionnaires. Although this approach has value, it is limited by the fact that our pre-defined questions may not ask about the things that the participant sees as most important and that we might not have thought of. Also, a participant may attach different meaning to a term such as “child” than do facilitators and data collectors.

A useful approach, then, is to ask open-ended questions that create a space within which the participant can move in whatever directions they see fit. The participant can raise the topics to be discussed and chooses how to use various terms such as “child,” “harms to children,” etc. The job of the listener is not to impose structure but to follow the participant’s lead, asking questions that will help to clarify exactly what the participant means.

To use this approach, the listener must adopt an open, empathic, inquisitive, and nonjudgmental stance. If a participant said, “The big harm to children here is witchcraft,” the listener should not question or challenge that idea (or, feeling uncomfortable, move to the next question) but should seek to learn more about it. What does the participant mean by witchcraft? What forms does it take? Are children themselves seen as witches? Why is that seen as such a big harm? How does witchcraft affect children and families?

Taking this orientation requires pushing one’s own beliefs, preferences, and understandings into the background. For example, you might think that witchcraft is not one of the main harms to children but is a backward, harmful practice that is quite rare.

However, the point of the interview or discussion is not to impose your views but to learn about the views of the participant or participants. To do this, it is best to adopt the role of a student who

is there to learn as much as possible about the views of this participant. The point is not to judge, correct, or counsel the participants but to come as close as one can to entering their subjective world.

In essence, this orientation assumes that “we don’t know what we don’t know.” That is, we don’t know what a participant means by the term “witchcraft” since they might think of it in very different ways from how we might understand the term. Also, there may be dimensions of the term that we cannot imagine since it is beyond our world view and experience. In this respect, we don’t even know that we don’t know about these things. By following one’s curiosity and asking respectful questions, we begin to learn many things that we might not have thought of otherwise.

In short, we can learn by asking respectful, open-ended questions that aim to zero in on the meanings that the participant assigns to a term such as witchcraft and on their views of how it affects children.

The Power of Probing Questions

At the most basic level, probing questions invite the participant to provide additional information that clarifies their views. Here is an example of what can happen when probing questions are not asked or are poorly focused. In the following dialogue, the statements by the participant are marked “P” while the statements from the facilitator are marked “F.”

F: What are the main harms to children here?

P: A big problem here is children coming back from the bush after they have killed people with armed groups.

F: What happens to such children?

P: People avoid them and fear them.

F: What other problems or harms to children occur here?

In this exchange, the facilitator did not ask why it is a big problem to have children coming back from the bush after they have killed people with armed groups. Perhaps it seemed obvious to the facilitator that such people would be seen as killers and as dangerous. Yet it is possible that that was not what the participant had meant. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, children who have killed or been around dead people in the bush are viewed as spiritually contaminated, that is, as carrying bad or harmful spirits. The local beliefs are that if such a child returned to his family and village, the bad spirits could cause deaths, illnesses, famine, and other problems.

Unfortunately, the facilitator in this example did not probe into what the participant saw as the problem of such children. Thus, he lost the opportunity to learn about the local cosmology (or world view) and what the actual problem was seen as. The follow-up question about what happens to such children is of limited usefulness without having an understanding of the nature

of the problem. For example, people might avoid and fear the child because they see the child as a killer. Or, they may avoid the child because they fear the angry spirits carried by the child.

Below is an example of how the same dialogue might have gone if the facilitator had asked an appropriate probing question.

F: What are the main harms to children here?

P: A big problem here is children coming back from the bush after they have killed people with armed groups.

F: How do you see such children?

P: They are feared because they carry bad spirits.

F: In what way do they carry bad spirits? Could you please tell me more about that?

P: You see, in my culture, when people are around the dead, they pick up bad spirits that follow them. The bad spirits can cause many problems—illness and even death—for anyone the children come into contact with.

F: How do people react to such children?

P: They fear them and stay away from them. Bad spirits are so powerful.

By asking an appropriate probing question early on in the discussion, the facilitator learned very rich information and probably came much closer to understanding what the participant had actually meant.

If this dialogue continued, the facilitator might learn that the local cosmology or world view is highly spiritualistic. Local people see the spirits as real and as determining whether one is healthy or not, and they may see people as being well when there is harmony between the living and the spirits of the ancestors.

Asking Useful Probing Questions

It is important for you to learn about and reflect on what are appropriate probing questions. Imagine that you are talking with an adult man about what he sees as some of the main harms to children in his neighborhood. The initial exchange is as follows:

F: What do you see as some of the main harms to children?

P: One big harm to children here is early marriage.

Is there a need to ask a probing question here? Why or why not?

Write below:

Consistent with the preceding example, we cannot assume that we know what the man means by “early marriage.” Nor can we assume that we know what the man understands by the term “children.” If we thank him and move forward by asking what are some other harms to children, we miss an important opportunity to learn what he means and what exactly he sees as the problem.

After all, one could define early marriage in many different ways, and one could see it as a problem for diverse reasons related to considerations of child health, law, family responsibilities, education, etc. The only way we will know what the participant really means is by asking good probing questions.

Next consider what could be appropriate probing questions after the participant says, “One big harm to children here is early marriage.” Please write two possible probing questions below.

Write below:

Did you ask what the man meant by “early marriage” or to give an example of early marriage?

Now let’s see how probing questions can help the facilitator to zero in on what exactly the participant means. Consider the following dialogue:

P: One big harm to children is early marriage.

F: Thank you for that. Could you please tell me more about what is early marriage?

P: Here many girls are married off by their parents when they are 14 years of age, or even younger.

F: How much younger?

P: Well, I’ve seen 12-year-old girls getting married and heard of even younger girls getting married.

F: How do you see early marriage as harming children?

P: One thing is the girl drops out of school.

F: Why is that important?

P: You see, being in school keeps the girl on a good track. If she is serious, she has hope for the future and brings honor to her family. If she drops out of school, she may not be able to support her children and has to get involved in sex work.

In this exchange, the facilitator asks multiple probing questions. Please take a moment and circle all the probing questions that the facilitator asked.

If you noted that each of the facilitator's questions asked above are probing questions, you are correct. By asking multiple probing questions, the facilitator succeeded in learning something about what the participant sees as "early marriage" and about how early marriage harms children. But this is hardly the end of the exchange, as the participant has presented multiple ideas that the skilled facilitator would want to learn more about. Think for a moment about and list what else does the facilitator need to ask about in order to learn more fully about the participant's views.

Write below:

Hopefully, this list includes items related to the age of girls involved in "early marriage." We know that the participant sees the marriage of 14-year-olds or 12-year-olds as harmful, but does that mean that he sees it as fine if, say, a 16-year-old girl got married? In other words, we don't know what the boundaries of the category "early marriage" are.

Asking appropriate probing questions could help to define these boundaries. For example, one could ask:

F: You said that 14-year-olds getting married counts as "early marriage." How old can a girl be and still have it count as early marriage?

Alternately, you might pose the question as:

F: What makes a marriage a regular marriage rather than an "early marriage"?

The latter question helps to probe how the participant defines "early marriage," allowing for age-based or other kinds of answers.

Hopefully, your list also included something related to how early marriage harms children. It is useful to know that the participant saw the main harm as being the disruption of education. But early marriage may have a host of unwanted effects. Thus, it could be useful to ask follow-up, probing questions such as:

F: Earlier, you mentioned that early marriage harms children because the girl has to drop out of school. Does early marriage harm children in other ways as well?

Furthermore, it is not clear whether the harms to children are, in the eyes of the participant, harms to girls only, or whether early marriage harms boys, too.

To summarize, probing questions enable one to learn more deeply about the views of a participant or participants. As we listen to someone, we should naturally be curious about what the participant means and ask questions that respectfully invite them to explain their views more fully.

Good probing questions are open-ended and yet are topically focused. They are open-ended in that they give the participant room to move in many directions. For example, the question “How is early marriage harmful to children?” enables many different responses and leaves the participant in control since the participant chooses which direction to go. Such a question is focused since it delves more deeply into why or in what respects is early marriage harmful to children. In addition, good probing questions are respectful—they do not challenge or imply disagreement with the participant. After all, the aim is to empathize deeply with them.

A key point is that good probing questions are nonjudgmental. To judge the participant by asking potentially threatening questions such as: “How can you say that?” or “How can you be so sure?” signals that we are judging or taking a position against what the participant is saying. Taking such an oppositional stance undermines our ability to empathize and likely makes the participant feel that their views are not respected.

Over time, people who do not feel respected are unlikely to speak freely around us or even to talk with us. In asking probing questions, then, we need to have an appreciative tone and control any unintended body language that could signal our discomfort or disapproval of what is being said.

Before continuing, please write briefly, in your own words, why we ask probing questions.

Write below:

Then read the questions below and circle which ones could be useful probing questions. For the items that you do not circle, think about why that question is not a good probing question.

1. Could you please give me an example of that?
2. How could that possibly be accurate?
3. Doesn't this harm children and violate children's rights?
4. Could you please explain what you mean by that?
5. Are there other ways in which this harm to children affects children negatively?
6. Have you checked your views against the data published by the government?

Did you notice that the second and third questions are not good probing questions because they have an accusatory tone and are not intended to explore fully the participant's views? Item 6 is also not useful as a probing question since it tacitly questions the accuracy of the participant's views.

Timing

Exercising good timing is a key part of asking effective probing questions. If we ask probing questions prematurely or ask too many in a row, we may disrupt the participant's train of thought or even make the conversation feel like an interrogation. Rather than coming into an interview with a great readiness to pose many probing questions, we first need to "read" the participant by observing them and asking ourselves, "Are they really passionate about what they are saying?" or reflecting that "Instead of me asking a lot of questions, it seems this person really wants to speak and 'pour it out.' Maybe it's best to listen carefully as the participant speaks for a few minutes, and to ask probing questions later." This is part of respectful learning, as it can be seen as disrespectful to interrupt an impassioned speaker to ask questions that might seem distracting to them.

This point applies even more strongly to dialogues. If two community members were discussing with great energy the question: "What are the main harms to children?", it is probably better to listen and take good notes, saving probing questions for later. With experience, one learns to ask probing questions in a manner that fits the rhythm of the speaker and helps them to explain their views fully.

Ethical Considerations

Imagine a hypothetical exchange in which the facilitator seeks to learn about a particular harm to children mentioned by a teenage girl.

P: A big problem for girls here is rape. Rape is horrible and really hurts people. [She begins sobbing]

F: Could you please tell me more about that?

Please reflect for a moment on this scenario. Did the facilitator do the right thing in asking a probing question?

Write below:

In this scenario, asking a probing question could easily cause unintended harm to the girl. Since the girl is upset, the asking of a probing question could “pick her open” and leave her feeling highly vulnerable. There are some key things we do not know. For example, could the girl be crying because she herself has been raped? Also, we don’t know anything about the girl’s history of mental health. Although she may have presented herself as feeling good and being stable, she may in fact have a history of depression. To ask a probing question could add significantly to her emotional burden, possibly leaving her feeling overwhelmed or even thinking about killing herself. Thus the asking of a probing question in this context is ethically unacceptable because it potentially causes harm.

Before asking probing questions, then, it is important to take stock of the participant or participants and the potential emotional burdens associated with what they have been discussing. If a participant starts to cry or seems upset or is withdrawing a bit, the interview or discussion should be gently suspended or ended, with patient accompaniment and psychological first aid² or even referral to more specialized treatment used to support the participant.

² World Health Organization, War Trauma Foundation and World Vision International (2011). *Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO.

Also, it can be inappropriate to ask probing questions when the participant or participants are “on a roll” and saying something that seems very important to them and needs to be expressed fully. In such situations, it is valuable to give the participants space to speak and express themselves without interruption. The facilitator can come back later to ask follow-up questions and learn more fully about exactly what is needed. To use probing questions in an appropriate manner, then, requires sensitivity, presence, patience, and “using one’s antennae” to take stock of the situation.

FAC 7. Enabling Inclusive Dialogue

Enabling inclusive dialogue is a complex process, and it may not come naturally to everyone. Yet with reflection and practice, one can learn this fundamental skill. In this tool, we will first reflect on what is “dialogue” and why inclusive dialogue is essential in a community-led approach. Then we will consider how to enable inclusive dialogue and to periodically reflect on questions that help us take stock of and strengthen the inclusivity of the dialogue and the wider community-led process.

What is Dialogue?

A dialogue is a space for open discussion and exchange of different points of view. Unlike debate, it is not a win–lose process of seeking to dominate. People in a debate often speak and act in hostile ways toward each other, and this can damage the relationship.

In contrast, a dialogue has an appreciative quality and is oriented toward mutual learning and sharing. This learning simultaneously strengthens relationships and helps the participants to achieve new insight into a problem or issue. Dialogues may occur between two people, in small groups, or even in larger groups such as community meetings.

To help you identify what is a dialogue, please read the three examples below and write brief comments on each, explaining how it is or is not an example of dialogue.

Example 1. This is a discussion involving three people, designated P1, P2, and P3.

P1: A big problem here is that parents do not listen to their children.

P2 (interrupting P1): How can you say that—the problem is that children do not listen to their parents! Look at all the children who go to the videos and dances, smoke bhang, drink, and act like wild animals. They disobey their own parents and have no respect!

P1: But the reason they don’t respect their parents is that their parents act like tyrants—they dictate one rule after another, but they don’t take time to listen to their children.

P3: Children here are a lost cause! They listen to no adults, and they pay no respect to elders.

Now comment briefly on how this is or is not an example of dialogue.

Write below:

Example 2. This is a discussion between two young adults (P1 and P2).

P1: For me, it may be fine to have a small family—only two or three children.

P2: I tend to want a larger family—you know, six or eight kids.

P1: Why do you want so many? How will you feed them all?

P2: I come from a large family. I have eight brothers and sisters! And it's the way of our people.

P1: I'd like my children to have a full belly and be able to go to university.

Now comment briefly on how this is or is not an example of dialogue, noting how it differs from the first example.

Write below:

Example 3. This is a discussion between four adults (P1–P4).

P1: The big harm to children here is being out of school.

P2: That's interesting—please tell me how you see that as a big harm.

P1: Well, children who are out of school get into all manner of trouble. They smoke, drink, gamble, and do nothing to help their families. Sometimes they steal and get in trouble with authorities. The girls—they get pregnant when their families cannot afford to feed another person.

P3: What you say about out-of-school children is really true. A few days ago, I saw a group of boys hanging around gambling and drinking. They were doing no good.

P4: I agree that out-of-school children is a harm. Yet I think maybe teenage pregnancy is also a big harm to children. Sometimes children drop out of school because of teenage pregnancy. Once girls are pregnant, their families cannot feed them, and they may end up doing sex work just to get by.

P1: Thanks for calling attention to that. You're right—teenage pregnancy is a big problem and sometimes leads children to drop out of school.

Now comment briefly on how this is or is not an example of dialogue, noting how it differs from the first two examples.

Write below:

Did you notice how the first example was mostly a debate and that the participants showed little interest in listening and learning about the other person's view? They seemed more oriented toward winning the argument by asserting their views and having their position dominate.

The second example is closer to a dialogue as there is no debate and some interest in why the other person holds the views that they do. However, there is not a full exploration of ideas that brings the participants to a new level of understanding.

Example 3 is the best illustration of a dialogue. It has an appreciative tone, and the participants invite each other to say more about their views, thereby encouraging a spirit of openness and co-learning. As the discussion continues, P1 expresses a new realization about teenage pregnancy, and this is valued learning rather than a matter of feeling humiliated at being defeated in a debate. Overall, dialogues such as that in example 3 are constructive and contribute the most to a community-led process.

Inclusive Dialogue and its Advantages

It is entirely possible for a group to have a dialogue that is constructive but not inclusive. Consider the following example of a four-person group.

P1: The biggest harm to children here is heavy work. Children are out of school, and they work until they are not healthy.

P2: What kinds of work are the big problem?

P1: Here it's mostly farming. Even young children go out to clear the land—they carry heavy loads, help dig—it's so tiring they cannot study at night. And they fall asleep in school. Before long they drop out.

P2: Do the families here encourage children to do the heavy work?

P1: Oh yes. You see, people here are very poor, and some people get only one meal a day. Can you imagine?! Farming is what families have to do to survive. So the parents are happy when their children help them farm.

Clearly, this is not an inclusive dialogue—what do persons three and four think? Why are they not participating? Now consider that P1 and P2 are men, whereas P3 and P4 are women. Please reflect on this situation and your feelings about it, jotting down your initial reactions.

Write below:

As a likely example of gender discrimination, this type of non-inclusive dialogue can be upsetting. In a rural area, it may be seen as normal, yet this example may continue a pattern of male domination that is part of a societal privileging of men over women. This pattern inflicts heavy psychological harm in the form of discrimination, which in turn could set the stage for a wider array of rights violations against women, including intimate partner violence. Thus it is important for dialogue to be inclusive and for facilitators to be attentive to the issues of power and gender (and also religion, caste, class, and related issues) that can lead to non-inclusive dialogue processes. Otherwise, dialogue processes may become harmful.

However, there are also positive reasons why dialogue processes should be inclusive. Can you think of a couple of ways in which inclusive dialogue is beneficial? Please jot them down.

Write below:

Did you consider that an inclusive process is equitable and enables everyone to fulfill their rights to participation and dignity? In addition, an inclusive process boosts diversity, and the exploration of diverse views is likely to lead to the development of better problem-solving options. Further, an inclusive process helps to build ownership and responsibility-taking by many different people. With many people pouring their energy and creativity into the work, the process is more likely to achieve positive outcomes for children and to be sustainable.

Strengthening the Inclusivity of Community Dialogues

Over time, communities can develop their own means of enabling inclusive dialogue on issues such as which harm to children should the community address through community-led action. However, communities frequently need a helping hand at the beginning of the process to enable high levels of inclusivity. Here are some suggestions on steps that you can take to facilitate an inclusive process.

- **Frame the discussions:** Remind the participants that this discussion is not a debate. There are no right or wrong answers, and it is important to hear the ideas of each person. Our goal is to learn from each other in our effort to support vulnerable children. A way to frame the discussion using a non-didactic approach is to ask people whether debate and a win-lose approach is always the best way of reaching a good decision for the community.
- **Model inclusive dialogue:** A valuable first step is to model the process for the community, doing small things such as setting an appreciative tone, thanking people for coming, reminding people that there are no right or wrong answers and that we have much to learn from each other, showing appreciation for each person's inputs, asking probing questions such as: "Could you please say more about that and why it is important?", showing that you are not threatened when someone disagrees, and inviting each person to speak.
- **Show gratitude:** Take an appreciative stance, and thank each person for her/his ideas, even when you personally disagree with them.
- **Observe who is not participating:** Keep track of who has and has not spoken, keeping an eye open for opportunities to engage them in a friendly way.
- **Invite people in:** In most group discussions, some people speak more than others, whereas some people say nothing. Help those who dominate discussions make space for other people by asking everyone periodically, "Is it important to hear the views of everyone here?" This can be followed by kindly and gently inviting people who have not spoken to share their thoughts. It is important, though, not to impose on people, or to try to force people who do not want to talk in a group setting to speak.
- **Reach out to people who are not participating:** If you observe that particular people or subgroups do not participate in the dialogues, it can be useful to quietly and kindly reach out to them, without pressuring them to participate. If you learn that the timing of discussions is an obstacle to very poor families who have to work longer hours than most people, you could try to schedule some discussions at a more workable time and respectfully invite poor families to participate.
- **Be sensitive to local norms:** In working to boost the inclusivity of dialogues, it is crucial to understand local norms, the violation of which could make life difficult for particular subgroups or individuals. For example, in a Muslim society, it might not be acceptable for men and women to meet together or for women to speak as if they were on an equal footing with men. In such circumstances, it is often best to seek the advice of women on

how to boost inclusive participation without upsetting too quickly or severely the power balance between men and women and increasing the risks of harms to women.

Ongoing Observation, Reflection, and Adjustment

Community-led work is an ongoing, evolving process, and local people may engage with it or step back for different reasons at different moments in time. For this reason, enabling an inclusive process is an ongoing priority and requires continuing attention and effort. Although it is up to communities to create an inclusive process, the facilitator can support this effort.

On an ongoing basis, facilitators should observe community discussions and activities first-hand, keeping an eye on how inclusive the process is. Important questions for the facilitators to ask themselves include the following:

- Who is participating in this phase? Do they seem to be enjoying it and finding meaning in it?
- Are girls as well as boys, and women as well as men, participating?
- How could men become more engaged in the community action?
- Are people from different religious groups or ethnic groups participating?
- Are people from very poor households or from marginalized groups participating?
- Are people with disabilities participating?
- Who is not participating in this phase? Why are they not participating?

Each phase of the community-led work is different and can usher in shifting patterns. For example, in the action phase, more young women than young men frequently get involved in implementing the intervention if it addresses a harm to children such as teenage pregnancy or early marriage.

Yet it is difficult to limit such harms without the full participation of men. In such circumstances, it is not the job of the facilitator to “fix the problem” by organizing meetings or taking steps to get more men involved in the intervention. Instead, the facilitator should help community groups to become aware of the need for greater involvement by men and to themselves take steps (such as organizing “men-only” meetings) to bring more men into the intervention process.

Please reflect for a moment how you could do this without your effort becoming a top-down approach. Jot down your thoughts below.

Write below:

There is no set script or recipe for helping community members to get more men engaged in the process. A useful approach could be one of dialogue and problem-solving by different subgroups. For example, the facilitator could ask groups such as an inter-village task force, the Peer Educators, male youth groups, and female youth groups whether men and women are equally involved in the action process and why. The facilitator could also invite reflection on the potential value of increased participation by men by asking follow-on questions such as: “Could the community action be strengthened if men were more actively involved in it?”

In keeping with a community-led approach, the community itself would take the decision whether and how to adjust its action process. A key skill of an effective facilitator is knowing when to step back, creating adequate space for communities to develop their own solutions on issues such as inclusivity. In a sense, a good facilitator should facilitate from behind.

FAC 8. Understanding Power Dynamics in the Community

The term “community” can suggest a homogeneous collective—a group of equal community members. Yet within each community lie significant differences of power and privilege.

Recognized leaders may have much greater influence, prestige, and power than do ordinary community people. Some people hold considerable power by virtue of their wealth, while very poor people may have little power and struggle to feed their families. Gender is often a major fault line regarding power, as most societies are steeped in patriarchy and assign most of the decision-making power to men rather than women.

Similarly, most societies privilege the views of adults over those of children when it comes to making important community decisions. Further, children from well-off families go to school and may have greater status and influence than do very poor children who are out of school and have to work to help support their families. Children with disabilities may be hidden away and have little voice or opportunity to interact with others in the community.

The Importance of Understanding Power Dynamics

It is appropriate to think through the importance of the fact that a community is typically a site of significant power differentials. In the space below, please jot down a few ideas about why understanding these power dynamics are important for community-led work that supports vulnerable children.

Write below:

Did you consider that the power dynamics in the community affect children’s vulnerability? Quite often, it is children from very poor, marginalized families who are at greatest risk and who end up engaging in child labor, sexual exploitation, association with armed forces and groups, etc. These children frequently lack access to supports and services that children from well-connected and relatively wealthy families enjoy. Understanding the local power dynamics can help one to better understand the patterns of risk and protective factors that determine children’s vulnerability. In turn, this puts one in a better position to take steps to reduce the vulnerabilities of children.

Also, understanding the local power dynamics enables one to engage with the community in a way that helps to create an inclusive process, without reproducing the existing power inequities.

For example, the community leader and the male elders might be the first people in a community whom you met. If you asked them whether they would help lead a process of community dialogue and decision-making regarding which harm to children to address and how, and they accepted, you might end up with a process in which decisions are taken by only a few, powerful adults who may not represent well the views of all the people in the community.

Without intending to exclude particular people, you may have boosted the power of the community elite and have done little to engage with or support more vulnerable people. It is of questionable value to speak of “community dialogue” and “community decision-making” if the dialogues and decisions include only—or are controlled by—a handful of relatively powerful people in the community.

Understanding local power dynamics can also help you to enable useful community dialogues about which harm to children to address and how to address that harm to children. For example, it may help you to understand who are the main influence agents in discussions, who may feel confident speaking up and who may feel reluctant to participate, and how participants might shy away from disagreeing with people who are more powerful. With these points in mind, we can now turn to learning about power dynamics.

Learning About Local Power Dynamics

Ideally, the community dialogues you will help to facilitate will be preceded by deep learning about the community that illuminates the local power dynamics. However, power dynamics often shift over time, so it is important to view learning about power dynamics as an ongoing process. Also, it is important that you gain a firsthand understanding of them.

Questions. As an adjunct to the initial learning process, you as facilitator can ask questions such as the following to different people and subgroups:

- Which people in the community hold greater power or influence?
- Are there people who have less power or are marginalized, even by virtue of food insecurity and having to work more than others to feed their families? Who are they?
- Do women and men hold equal power in making decisions? Whose views carry the greatest weight, and who makes most of the decisions?
- Do teenagers and adults hold equal power in making decisions? Whose views carry the greatest weight, and who makes most of the decisions?

In asking questions such as these, it is important to ask probing questions that help to bring out fully the views of the person you are talking with.

Participants. A valuable strategy in learning about power dynamics is to talk with a variety of people who are positioned in different ways according to gender, class or socio-economic status, religion, etc. It might be useful to talk with prestigious, influential people such as community leaders, school teachers, elder men and women, imams or pastors, youth group leaders, etc. It is

also important to talk with women as well as men, with teenagers as well as adults, and with people who are the poorest of the poor or who are part of relatively marginalized subgroups such as refugees, as they may have quite different views. It is less your job to sort through whose views are “correct” than to learn how views of power depend very much on where one sits in the community.

In approaching very poor or marginalized people, care should be taken to respect their schedules, meet at times and places that are convenient for them, and avoid unintentionally stigmatizing them by singling them out or labeling them.

One way to do this is by taking a transect walk through the community. This entails walking on a straight line all the way through a community, from end to center and back out to the other end. Along the way, you can stop and talk with people and visit homes you see so long as this is done in a respectful manner and you do not impose on people. It is best if the imaginary line you follow leads into areas you are not familiar with. By picking the orientation of the line at random, you increase your chances of coming into contact with people and areas that have considerable diversity.

Participant Observation³. Direct observation is also very useful in learning about power dynamics. Deeds speak louder than words, and often there is a gap between what people say and what they actually do. Because you will be spending significant amounts of time in the community, you will be in a position to observe interactions, meetings, and discussions as part of your everyday activities.

For example, in having tea with some men in the community, you might notice that women and men take tea separately and that key community issues and priorities are often discussed by the men when they take tea. Similarly, at community meetings, you might observe that what men, particularly community leaders, say carries greater weight than what women say. You might also notice that families typically send their sons for higher levels of education than they provide for their daughters.

These and other observations could fit a pattern of gender discrimination and male privileging that vests greater power in the hands of men. Being aware of this pattern can be quite valuable when it comes to enabling open discussion since people who hold relatively little power are frequently reluctant to speak openly in front of people who hold greater power, particularly if the latter engage in abusive behavior such as sexual exploitation and abuse or interpersonal violence.

³ See Tool LNG 4 for in depth discussion of participant observation.

Similarly, you might observe that people from very poor families seldom attend community meetings. This is highly useful information in helping to create an inclusive process since it means that community dialogues at regular community meetings are not fully inclusive. Other means may be needed in order to reach out to and engage with people who do not participate in community meetings.

In the process of learning about power dynamics, it is also important to think critically about your own power and position relative to community members. You may want to re-visit tool FAC 2 to help you reflect on how you are likely perceived by community members, whether you are tacitly favoring particular people or subgroups, whether you are observing or also judging, and whether you are garnering too much power by making yourself too central in the dialogue process. Considering these questions is every bit as much of an ongoing process as is learning about local power dynamics.

FAC 9. Nonviolent Conflict Management

A key task of the facilitator is to enable constructive dialogue among many different community members for the purposes of collective planning and action in regard to supporting vulnerable children.

Constructive dialogue is a process in which different people express a range of views and the reasoning and values behind them. In this approach, the dialogue participants see divergent views as positive since they enable everyone to deepen their understanding of the issues. As the dialogues proceed and ideas are explored fully, particular ideas may come to be seen as having greater merit than others, leading to a general agreement among the participants. In this way, conflict may be constructive.

However, divergent views are not always expressed in a constructive manner, and conflict can become quite destructive. It is normal for some people to want to consider different views in a quiet, reflective manner, whereas other people want to have a debate that has a winner and a loser. This competitive turn can spark strong emotions and can unleash anger, frustration, and other negative emotions. Also, in discussions about harms to children and how to address them, some participants may express their views in a passionate manner and engage in heated disagreements with others who have expressed opposing views.

As conflict escalates during the discussion, people may say or do hurtful things, berate the other person or views, or become so angry that they attack the other person verbally or physically. The person or people who feel attacked may experience anger, frustration, or humiliation, leading them to strike back. In this way, conflict may be destructive and can spiral out of control.

A key question, then, is how to manage conflict so as to prevent destructive conflict from occurring and limiting it when it does occur. This tool offers some general suggestions for doing these things. Recognizing that every context is unique and that there may be a number of local ways of managing conflict in a nonviolent manner, a useful approach is to begin by eliciting local ideas about how to keep discussions constructive.

Eliciting Local Views

Before initiating a community-wide dialogue process, it is important to have a basic understanding of power dynamics, behavior and social norms around discussions, and local mechanisms for handling conflict. The emphasis here is on the latter two since the preceding tool focuses on understanding power dynamics in communities.

Behavior and Social Norms Around Discussions

It is useful to ask various key informants (e.g., women, men, teenage girls, teenage boys) questions that help one to learn how discussions usually go, what is viewed as acceptable or unacceptable behavior in discussions, and what are the social rules regarding discussions, and

what forms disruptive behavior typically takes. Here are some potentially useful questions to ask key informants:

- In discussions, who usually speaks more—women or men? Children or adults?
- In discussions among ordinary people, what do people do when they disagree? What is the socially appropriate way to express disagreement?
- Are there some issues that tend to provoke strong feelings and difficult behavior (e.g., displays of anger, shouting, accusations) during discussions? What are they?
- When strong feelings and difficult behavior occur during discussions, what are some things that typically help to calm things down and get discussions back on a constructive track?
- Are discussions here sometimes interrupted by disruptive behavior of bystanders (non-participants in the discussions)? What can be done to manage or prevent such disruptions?

Local Mechanisms for Handling Conflict Constructively

Because destructive conflict threatens social harmony and well-being, most societies have developed mechanisms for managing and preventing destructive conflict. These may include laws, social norms, processes for settling conflicts, and means of reducing conflict such as cooperation and relationship-building, prayer, proverbs, humor, song, dance, story, etc. For example, in rural Sierra Leone, as former child soldiers were about to return home, many people feared the children, seeing them as killers or as people who behaved like animals. A significant turning point—one that used a combination of empathy and reframing—came when religious leaders reminded people that, “These are our children, they have suffered, too, and they are our responsibility.” To learn about local mechanisms, it can be useful to ask key informants questions such as the following:

- If two people here get into a heated argument and cannot agree, what things are done to help them come to an agreement?
- Are there particular people here who help to settle disputes when they arise?
- What role do religious leaders and faith communities play in handling disagreements?
- Do elements such as proverbs, songs, humor, etc. play a role here in managing or resolving conflict? Please give an example.

Preventing Destructive Conflict

In most circumstances, it is important to prevent destructive conflict rather than allowing it to occur and then trying to pick up the pieces and restore relationships afterwards. For facilitators,

important means of prevention are engaging with local mechanisms for constructive conflict management, effective framing, finding common ground, and structuring discussions.

Engaging with Local Resources and Mechanisms

In a community-led process, it is natural for community resources and mechanisms for handling conflicts in a constructive manner to find their way into the community dialogues and problem-solving discussions. However, this may not happen all at once, or particular elders and religious leaders may not engage initially since they want to wait to see which direction the discussions will take. It can be valuable, then, for facilitators to reach out and deliberately engage early on with key people and mechanisms that can help to manage conflict in a constructive manner.

Having learned about the local people and community processes for handling conflict, the facilitator should engage with the ones that seem best positioned to support the community-led dialogue and decision-making process.

For example, there may be religious leaders or lay leaders who are recognized as having a “cool head” and the ability to keep discussions from becoming too heated. The facilitator should engage with these leaders, explaining the importance of having constructive dialogues and asking whether they might be willing to participate and help manage conflicts as the need arises.

Their early engagement and buy-in could help to keep the dialogues moving in a positive direction and reduce the chances that destructive discussions might occur, thereby discouraging some people from participating. Also, it sets the stage for their ongoing participation and spirit of ownership, which can contribute to the sustainability of the process.

In many societies, it is customary to open meetings and discussions with prayer. A way of building on this local resource is to say the prayer in a way that invites listening, open sharing and dialogue. If multiple religions are present in the community, it would be valuable to open with multiple prayers, not privileging any one faith. This approach is not only contextually appropriate but may help to bring the deeper values of people’s faith—which may include tolerance, respect, listening, humility, etc.—to the fore, thereby supporting constructive dialogue.

Similarly, the facilitator should engage with community mechanisms for handling conflicts, taking care to discern ones that are congruent with human rights. If, for example, the community had established By-Laws against behaviors such as fighting or name-calling, the facilitator should engage with the chief and/or elders who are responsible for implementing the By-Laws. Although it is extremely rare for such mechanisms to have to be brought into play in community-led processes of child protection, it is important to respect such mechanisms and to recognize that they could serve as valuable referral mechanisms in the unlikely situation that fights erupted. This approach is consistent with the idea of building on local resources and processes rather than imposing mechanisms from the outside.

Framing

The manner in which one frames or introduces a dialogue process or a particular discussion can have a significant impact on how it unfolds and whether it leans toward being a constructive or destructive process. To see the importance of framing, consider the following introduction of a community discussion about which harm to children to address:

1. “Over the past weeks, the community has been in a process of discussing which harm or harms to children to address through community-led action. Already you have identified eight different harms to children that need to be addressed. Now we need to discuss which harm(s) to address. Let’s please bring out many different ideas and make sure that we decide which one has the greatest merit. Who would like to begin—which harm(s) to children do you think the community should address and why?”

Take a couple of minutes and jot down a few notes on what you see as the likely strengths and weaknesses of this framing message.

Write below:

Strengths: _____

Weaknesses: _____

Did you notice how framing this as a debate could encourage people to assert their own views and defeat those of other people? Although debates are useful for a variety of purposes, they often do not promote positive relationships, and often they reduce people’s willingness to listen deeply since the priority is on “winning” by defeating one’s opponents. The framing above has the strength of inviting many different ideas. Yet some people may not feel comfortable sharing their ideas in a debate forum.

Now consider a second way of framing the same discussion:

2. “We are in a process of listening and learning together about the various harms to children in the community, and already in previous discussions you have identified eight different harms to children that ought to be addressed. Now we need to think through together which one harm to children the community should address through its collective action. It’s important to recognize that

there are no “right” and “wrong” answers—please feel free to suggest your own opinion. We are not here to debate, so if someone presents a view that differs a lot from your own, there is no need to argue or to talk down the other person. Our aim is to hear each other’s views, which will give each of us much food for thought. We are not trying to take a decision today as there will be many discussions on this topic over the next few months. What is important today is that we share our own views openly and seek to learn from each view that is expressed. Let us go around the circle and have each person who wants to say something speak for a minute or so. As we do this, let us adhere to the ground rules we had established earlier that call for listening, respect, no shouting or name calling, and mobile phones off.”

Please take a couple of minutes to jot down what you see as likely strengths and weaknesses of this framing.

Write below:

Strengths: _____

Weaknesses: _____

The second framing has significant advantages over the first. It explicitly states that this is not a debate but an effort to think through which harm to children to address through community action.

By emphasizing there are no right or wrong answers, it puts people more at ease in presenting their own views. In an effort to promote listening and learning, this framing states that the goal is to hear each other’s views and learn from the views that are shared.

By noting that there will be multiple discussions over some time, it helps to reduce any felt pressure to assert one’s views or achieve a final choice today. This approach helps to create space for dialogue, without pressure for immediate decision-making. The reminder of previously established ground rules regarding listening and respect helps to set the stage for constructive dialogue. Since this manner of framing encourages and creates space for listening, sharing, and discussion, it is more likely to set the stage for constructive dialogue and to get things off on the right foot.

Finding Common Ground

A second strategy for enabling constructive conflict and also managing difficult situations is for the facilitator and the participants in the dialogue to identify common ground. Typically, this entails finding cross-cutting or similar issues or identifying common underlying values. When people who hold different views see there is common ground, they often feel less inclined to cling to their own view and become receptive to endorsing a view that has collective support, even if the support is not unanimous. In addition, finding common ground helps to build positive relationships among participants. After all, other people do not seem so very different from me if they hold some views that are similar to my own.

Quite often, people are more willing to listen to and affiliate with people who hold views that bear some similarity to their own. And they are less likely to radically oppose, put down, or fight with people who are seen as holding similar views. In these regards, finding common ground helps to prevent destructive conflict and enable constructive handling of the differences that exist between people or groups.

In finding common ground, there are several steps, the first of which is usually to look for common or overlapping elements in the different views that have been expressed. For example, assume that the facilitating group is bringing together representatives of the three communities to try to help them select a single harm to children to address by all three communities. Also, assume that three different communities identified the top three harms to children as follows:

<i>Community 1</i>	<i>Community 2</i>	<i>Community 3</i>
1. heavy work	1. teenage pregnancy	1. sexual exploitation
2. out-of-school children	2. out-of-school children	2. teenage pregnancy
3. teenage pregnancy	3. early marriage	3. early marriage

Of the issues identified, which ones are cross-cutting, that is, identified in more than one community? Is there an issue identified in all three communities? Please write in your answers below.

More than one community_____

All three communities_____

By helping participants see these cross-cutting issues and also commonalities in associated issues, one can help people to find common ground in deciding on a single harm to children to address. This can be done by asking questions such as those above to the participants. The fact that all three communities identify teenage pregnancy as one of the top harms to children qualifies it as a source of some agreement and common ground. The ways in which teenage pregnancy represents common ground may also be apparent in listening carefully to people's explanations about why particular issues are important.

For example, people who indicate that teenage pregnancy is a key harm to children may also rate being out of school as an important harm to children. Important connections exist between these issues, as in most low- and middle-income countries, a teenage girl who is pregnant cannot attend school.

Similarly, there may be links or connections between teenage pregnancy and issues such as early marriage, as girls who marry at age 15 may be very likely to become pregnant during the teenage years.

Another way to help people find common ground is to appeal to their sense of working for the collective good. This can sometimes be done by including in the framing a statement such as: "Although it is important for each person to share her or his views openly, it is also important for us to listen and find points of general agreement and to not put our own views in the way of finding general agreement."

We have now reviewed three different ways of preventing destructive conflict—engaging with local resources, framing discussions, and finding common ground. However, destructive conflict may still occur, and we need to be ready to handle it.

Defusing or Containing Destructive Conflict

In some situations, destructive conflict occurs in the form of shouting or expressing outrage at another person's ideas. Sometimes, in discussions of which harm to children to address, people can get so impassioned that they lapse into a debate style, try to refute the other person's ideas, and even get upset and shout at the other person when their own views are not supported. This may occur even if one had framed the discussion in an appropriate manner that was aimed to prevent destructive conflict.

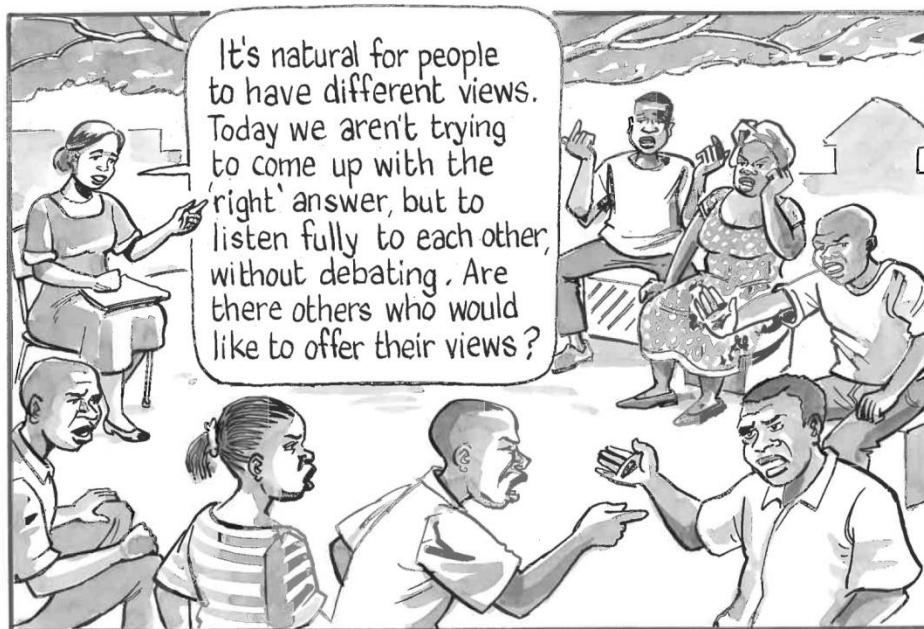
Think for several minutes how you might handle such a situation, picturing it in your mind as clearly as possible. Please jot down a couple of ideas for handling it.

Write below:

Numerous strategies can be useful in defusing this type of destructive conflict:

- ***Stay calm and focused on the problem.*** It helps to attend to one's breathing, making sure to take long, slow breaths that keep one relaxed. Seeing someone be calm amidst heated arguments can sometimes help other people to remain calm and focused.
- ***Intervene early, avoiding having the conflict escalate further.*** Your intervention should be kind but firm and could include elements such as those below.
- ***Remind the participants of the aims and ground rules of the dialogue.*** The aim is to explore different ideas, without claiming that one is right and the others are wrong. A ground rule is that each person should be free to express their ideas. People will not feel free to express their ideas if participants raise their voices or criticize each other harshly. Also remind everyone that this is not the only venue for the discussions—there will be many more, and there is no reason to press to reach agreement today.
- ***Call attention to our common purpose and the importance of good process.*** Remind participants that we are all working to help prevent and address harms to children. These harms are so complex that there are no easy answers. It is important to be humble in the face of complexity and to work toward our common goal together by listening and learning from each other.
- ***Use appropriate humor*** to lighten the mood and help get the discussion moving in a constructive vein. It is crucial, though, that the humor should not take sides or make one or both people in the argument appear foolish.
- ***Gently invite a shift to hearing other people's ideas.*** This is in the spirit of full participation and the importance of each person's ideas. Enacting the shift, though, needs to be done with care and respect for the people who were arguing and with effort to avoid humiliation.

MANAGING CONFLICT



On a rare occasion, destructive conflicts that are ongoing in the community find their way into the discussions that are part of the community-led process of action on behalf of vulnerable children. In such cases, it is important to seek the advice of wise, equable people in the community on how to manage the situation. Also, it can be useful in advance of the group dialogues to have one-on-one meetings with the people who will likely clash at the group meetings. Conducted in a respectful manner, such meetings can help to bleed off steam, keep the conflict limited, and also remind the individual of the collective purpose and aim of the dialogues as well as the ground rules.