

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 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.