

## Section 4: Note to Users

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*The tools in this section invite managers and other users to reflect critically on their agency's approach to engaging with communities and to consider a more community-led approach.*

*It also recognizes that many managers will have a host of practical questions about things such as qualities to look for in facilitators, the phases of engaging with communities, and the kinds of benchmarks one can use to tell whether one is on a productive track, among others.*

*Recognizing that there are no "final" or universal answers to these questions, the tools in this section seek to give illustrative examples that stir the imagination and invite one to think how it might go in a particular context.*

*Managers also may find it useful to have a more in-depth look at an example of community-led work, together with tools that were used to support it. For this reason, this section includes a case study from Sierra Leone and some of the tools used as part of the community-led work.*

*It is important to recognize, though, that there is no one-size-fits-all in regard to community-led approaches. The Sierra Leone example and tools are best seen as illustrations and should not be seen as prescriptions for how to do community-led work.*

## **MGM 8. Thinking Through Facilitators’ Ethical Responsibilities**

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Facilitators in a community-led approach are required to behave in ways that are ethical, role appropriate, and respectful. Ethical issues are omnipresent and do not allow simple black and white answers. They are sufficiently complex that facilitators should never feel that they are left to address them “on their own.” In fact, dialogue with mentors, superiors, and community people of high integrity is essential for taking stock of different situations, reflecting on one’s own behavior, and following a contextually appropriate course of action.

A dilemma for many NGOs is how to balance a community-led approach with their Child Safeguarding and child protection policies. This issue is particularly acute with regard to the question of whether a facilitator in a community-led approach should be obligated to report violations against children that they observe or become aware of. For example, should a facilitator who observes a father beating his child for misbehavior following the local social norms report this violation to their agency? For many agencies, there may seem to be no dilemma, as their Child Safeguarding policies dictate that all staff have an obligation to report in ways that follow their agency procedures. This reporting obligation recognizes that the NGO has an ethical obligation to respond and that it would be unethical to do nothing while violations are occurring and children’s rights are being trampled.

Although this approach has its merits, it poses significant problems in a community-led approach. For one thing, if a facilitator reported a violation and their agency responded, even referring the case to authorities, local people would see the facilitator as judging or monitoring local people, thereby undermining trust and the facilitator’s perceived neutrality. From the agency’s standpoint a significant problem is that the agency’s Child Safeguarding policy, which has a top-down approach, is on a collision course with a community-led approach. Adherents of mandatory reporting will likely argue that such a collision is appropriate and that ethical reporting processes take precedence over the continuation of community-led approaches.

However, an alternative way to conceptualize the ethical issues here is to recognize that the undermining of a community-led approach also has ethical implications. If the community-led approach is having benefits for children now, would it be ethically advisable to undermine the process that yields those benefits and protections for children? Also, if the community-led approach has more sustainable benefits for children, is it ethically advisable to deny children those benefits? Perhaps a mandatory reporting obligation reflects a case-based approach to thinking about ethics, whereas ethical consideration should be given to the wider group and to the benefits that come with effective community ownership and prevention.

Let’s explore this further using a hypothetical scenario. Using a community-led approach, your agency has enabled a community process that has made significant reductions in teenage pregnancy. Across six villages, there have been reductions each year of approximately 15 teenage pregnancies, which carried increased risks of things such as maternal mortality, dropping out of school, and engagement in sex work for purposes of survival. Now consider whether a

facilitator who observes a father beating his child for misbehavior should report this violation to their agency. They know that reporting will undermine the community trust since the agency will be likely to follow a top-down process of either visiting and educating the father, or, if the beating were severe, reporting the father to the authorities. For ethical reasons, the facilitator is reluctant to undermine the community-led process that seems to be helping to save lives and reduce girls' exposure to significant risks such as teen pregnancy and sexual exploitation. At the same time, the facilitator thinks it would be unethical to do nothing, as that could enable the beating to continue and might make them and their agency complicit in it.

This kind of ethical dilemma, which has many facets, admits no simple answers. It is not presented here as a way of suggesting that agencies should do away with their Child Safeguarding policies or should go along with whatever communities want to do in raising and guiding their children. Rather, it is to suggest that agencies need to wrestle with these ethical issues and not leave facilitators in a community-led approach either paralyzed in their dilemma or left to think it through on their own, which could lead to inconsistent approaches across facilitators.

This tool invites agencies to intentionally think through the ethics of this kind of situation and to give coherent guidance to their facilitators. In a spirit of dialogue, the box below shares the approach that has been developed by one interagency team.

### **Example: Interagency Action Research on Community-led Child Protection Processes in Jharkhand, India**

A group of four Indian agencies (CINI, Chetna Vikas, Plan/India, and Praxis) and one international agency (the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity) developed the approach below in addressing the ethical dilemma raised above.

- In general, agencies and facilitators should stick to the role of “facilitators” in view of the demands of this role. Facilitators should stay away from a case-management approach, and engage with child protection issues with a generic, preventive focus during our interactions with various community level stakeholders.
- In case a child reports to a facilitator a violation against a child, the facilitator will make available to them a list of contact details of relevant authorities, so that they can pursue the matter if they wish to, with the help of trusted people in their close circles. CINI and Chetna Vikas will make available to facilitators such a list for their respective districts.
- Should a case of serious or urgent nature be intimated to our facilitators, e.g. related to sexual offenses or suicidal tendencies, they will pro-actively reach out to a trustworthy person within the close circles of the child (identified on the basis of the child’s own judgment) and confidentially advise/persuade this person to take necessary actions, without compromising the dignity or interests of the child.
- Agency partners will continue to focus on working towards emergence of an effective community-based child protection mechanism in the selected villages, which can respond to such situations appropriately in the future.
- In case any facilitator faces any other unexpected situation or has any dilemmas, they could get in touch with seniors within their respective organizations for guidance as per the Child Protection policy of the organization.