

# Community Conversation Model Implementation Guide for Managers



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## List of Abbreviations

CBO	Community Based Organizations
CC	Community Conversation
FBO	Faith Based Organization
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GO	Government Organization
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practices
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
TOF	Training of Facilitators
TOT	Training of Trainers

## 1. Introduction

This brief management guide is prepared to serve as implementation guide for organizations (governmental, nongovernmental, or community based) managers and supervisors who use CC strategy in the efforts they make to abandon FGM. This is based completely on field experiences. Community conversation is a flexible model that allows adoption to different contexts and there is always an opportunity to develop this further based on learnings from the ground experience. This guide gives good starting points from experience on how to plan the intervention generally, how to mobilize communities and facilitators for CC, how to train and build capacities, how to manage resonance effect of CC and how to ensure sustainability of changes.

## 2. Planning of Community Mobilization Interventions

### **A. Baseline Data of Current Situations and socio Cultural Settings**

Implementing organizations are advised to gather and document baseline data about the existing situation prior to interventions so as to facilitate evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of CC at a later stage. If the data already exists, there is no need for additional effort. It is quite important to note the fact that some of the tools used in CC can help in generating qualitative data on existing situation, ongoing processes and outcomes at the community level. If necessary, this can be substantiated by other means of data collection. Baseline studies need to clearly identify indicators against which the changes can be tracked and progresses can be evaluated.

### **B. Familiarization of the Intervention**

Once the target area is identified and baseline is undertaken, the next step is to start the process of getting to know the main actors and stakeholders more closely and build relationship with them. The actors include local administration, sector offices, religious leaders, clan leaders, women and youth groups and others. This paves a way for smooth operation and for CC, which should be seen as an ongoing process.

Once relations have been established, an enrollment workshop is conducted for identified key partners from the various organizations, representatives of local administration and community representative in the target area.

The purpose of the workshop will be to:

- Introduce the overall concept as well as objectives of CC
- Explain the various steps in the process of mobilizing communities and resources
- Get consent and support of stakeholders
- Briefly present the plan of action
- Reach consensus on the way forward

### **C. Selection of Community Facilitators and Target Groups**

Community Conversation is as productive and effective as the facilitators we select. An organization needs to develop criteria to select community facilitators. From experiences thus far, the following are major among criteria to select facilitators. Two community facilitators (a male and a female) are selected for each community based on the criteria below.

- Literacy (high school complete) - this may increase or decrease based on level of literacy of the communities we work in
- Respect and recognition the person has within the community
- Earlier experience and participation in facilitating community development
- Stability in the community – eg. Young married female and male members of the community can be good candidates
- Willingness to work as community volunteer
- If possible basic knowledge on the thematic issue to be dealt

## **3. Training of Community Conversation Facilitators**

### **3.1. Training of Trainers (TOT)**

There can be two types of training on CC methodology with different content and duration. The training of trainers and training of facilitators are separately conducted based on the CC manual.

**Objective:** Building skills of individuals who will comprise team of trainers who will be responsible to conduct training of Facilitators (TOF) in CC methodology. This training needs to include including competences of trainers on planning and implementation of CC.

**Participants:** Professional and experienced staff members of GO, NGO, CBO or FBO who have the capacity and time to facilitate training of facilitators. Recommended number of participants is from 25-30 per session

**Methodology:** Participants will go through the entire CC methodology, tools and skills. Moreover, they will also acquire the skills needed to train facilitators

**Duration:** 7 days

**Trainers:** Experts who have got conceptual understanding of Community mobilization, have attended TOT, Facilitated training of facilitators (TOF) in the past and have minimum of 6 months field level experience can facilitate the TOT. Trainers can work in a team of 3 persons per session, depending upon the depth of orientation in the methodology. Some individuals who have the potential to work as trainers but have limited experience can be invited to join the team so as to coach and prepare them for future assignments.

In addition to the above initial training, refresher-training programs can also be arranged at certain intervals so as to develop the competence and confidence of the trainers. It is also advisable to involve these people during follow up visits and skills reinforcement sessions. If the implementing organization can get support from other organizations to conduct the training of facilitators, then conducting training of trainers at organizational level might not be always necessary.

### 3.2. Training of Facilitators (TOF)

**Objective:** Building the skills of individuals who are directly responsible for actual facilitation of CC.

**Participants/Facilitators:** These are individuals who are based in the community where CC is going to take place and they are expected to fluently speak the local language and

be aware of local culture, norms and values. This is important in order to develop trust and good working relationship with communities. Staff members of GO and NGO can also serve as facilitators as this is not a full time job with communities recommended number of participants is from 30-35 per session.

**Methodology:** Participants will go through CCs methodology, tools and skills necessary to facilitate the mobilization efforts in their assigned communities

**Duration:** 7-9 days depending on the language use

**Trainers of Facilitators:** Individuals who have attended TOT, conducted TOF and minimum of 3 months field level experience can facilitate Training of Facilitators. They can work in team of 2-3 persons per session, depending upon their depth of orientation in the methodology. Some individuals who have the potential to work as trainer but are inexperienced can invited to join the team so as to coach and prepare them for future assignment.

In addition to the above initial training, there will be skills reinforcement sessions on the methodology for facilitators during follow up visits. Additional training programs should also be organized for facilitators on basic facts on the thematic issues such as Harmful traditional practices, gender based violence and etc.

#### 4. Composition and Number of Participants

Community Conversation provides space where people can raise and discuss issues of common concern in a given community. In an ideal CCs sessions, all categories of people; rich and poor, young and elderly , men and women, literate and non-literate, boys and girls, married and single, traditional healers, birth attendants, circumcisers, religious leaders, clan leaders, representatives of local administration, etc., will be represented to participate in CCs together without any discrimination and exclusion. Initial reservation and hesitation to actively participate by some groups (like women) would be solved after a few CC sessions.



**Picture 1: Recruiting and Selection of Community Conversation Team Members**

Certain organizations have initiated CCs with one specific group of people in a community (youth, commercial sex workers, mothers, etc.). However, organizations implementing such CCs should have a clear plan of involving the general community at some stage in the process, preferably at the stage of concern exploration but definitely before the decision-making step in the CC methodological framework (please refer to manual for details on the methodology framework) to be inclusive and get support and assistance from the whole community in a holistic manner. As a general remark, working with a single target group might serve as an entry point but it is discouraged as an approach to implement CC. Otherwise, the whole process might not generate effective decision and action at community level.

Recommended number of participants in one CCs site is from 50 to 70 people. The reason for limiting the number is to ensure active participation and involvement of all participants. If the number of participants is beyond 70, then it is advisable to start another CCs site with newcomers. However, it is quite important to bear in mind that community



members should always be encouraged and invited to join CCs at any time without any restriction.

CCs can be started either with a community group as a new initiative on HTPs, GBVs or any other development concern of communities.

To initiate CCs, facilitators in close contact and coordination with the local administration office and/or local community chiefs and CBO leaders can identify and invite community members for CCs. Once the conversation is started in a Kebele or village, then people who are willing can come and join the conversation at any time.

## 5. Frequency and Duration of CC

Participants of CC sessions are encouraged and requested to have at least two CCs sessions per month. Bi-monthly sessions will enable participants to keep interest in the issues and maintain the momentum. Weekly sessions can also be conducted but should not be imposed by facilitators.

## 6. Duration of CC Sessions

With regard to the duration of a session, the field level experience so far shows that 2 to 2:30 hours for each CCs sessions is adequate. However, the communities can stay longer and continue discussion if they are willing and interested in the issues being raised.

## 7. Place, Date and Time for CC

Community Conversation sessions can be conducted either under a tree or in a classroom, depending upon the actual context and preference of participants. Whatever the location, everybody should be treated equally. For instance, if you are using chairs, make sure that there are enough similar chairs for everybody.

Location and time for conducting CCs need to be determined taking into account the local context, like the market day, worship day and time etc. This point has to be discussed and agreed upon by participants in the first CC session. Facilitators should not by any

means impose their own preferences, as this would have important impact on the level of participation at a later stage.

## 8. Payments and Refreshments during CC

As a matter of principle and field level experiences so far, shows no payment is given to CC participants in the form of per diem for attending a bi-monthly sessions. Simple refreshments can be arranged (tea and bread, coffee ceremony, etc.) although this is still optional depending upon actual context. There is a practice of paying lunch allowance during quarterly experience-sharing meetings among the different CC groups. This is because the participants will need to move away from home to go to a center. Facilitators are also paid certain amount of money on a monthly basis as an incentive to cover minor expenses such as communication and transport. It is quite important to bear in mind the issue of sustainability while fixing and introducing various payments during implementation of CC.

## 9. Facilitation Process

### A. Number of Facilitators for CC

Facilitators are the ones who are directly responsible for the actual implementation of CCs with community. Ideally, there should be a team of two or three facilitators to handle one CCs session. It is also advisable to have both male and female facilitators.

### B. Role of Facilitators

In CC process and sessions, facilitators play a critical role in coordinating the activity; guiding the process and mobilizing participation (see the CC manual for details). Some of their specific duties and responsibilities include the following:

- Guiding the sessions/discussions: Facilitators lead discussions by introducing discussion topics, facilitating dialogue, raising questions, writing main points during brainstorming sessions, summarizing and analyzing discussion points and helping reach consensus. Facilitators are not allowed to impose their ideas and

or dominate the discussion. Their role is to help communities' converse and explore issues and concerns and reach decision.

- Documentation of process: facilitators are responsible to document on a regular basis both the process and content of all CCs sessions through various means and ways (reports, pictures, recording, maps, etc.). Communities should also be given the chance and encouraged to document the process in a way that is easy and manageable for them (poems, songs, etc.). Please refer to section 12 below for further information on documentation.
- Liaison with local administration: Facilitators are advised to keep close contact with local administration so as to get their support for successful implementation of decisions coming out of CCs.
- Follow up implementation of community decisions: Facilitators should closely follow up implementation of decisions of the community.
- Ensure availability of materials needed for CCs sessions: it is also up to the facilitators to make sure that materials needed for facilitating and documenting CC sessions are available on time. The materials may include flipchart stand (which can be substituted by wall or even three), flipchart paper, marker, notebooks, pen lined/duplicating paper, register book, camera and mini tape-recorder.

### C. Facilitation Approach

As a working principle, facilitators are always advised to split participants into smaller groups for initial reflection and discussion on a topic or an issue. This session would be followed by presentation and discussion at plenary. Facilitators should stay close to all the groups to make sure that they are proceeding in the right direction.

The sitting arrangement will have an important contribution for active participation of members during discussions and interactions. During small breakout sessions participants can sit in a circle where everyone can see everyone else's face. During sessions where all participants are taking part (like plenary presentation), it is better to have two or three semicircles, with open space for the facilitator or presenter.

## D. Follow up and Strengthening CC Process

### i. Facilitators Meeting

Facilitators are required to have regular planning, reflection and documentation meetings before and after each CC session. These meetings would enable facilitators to follow up the developments on a continuous basis as a group and to prepare themselves to effectively and efficiently lead the process in a coordinated manner. Facilitators would also use this meetings to discuss and reach consensus on what to document after each CC Session.

If an organization is running different CCs sites in a locality, arranging monthly meetings for all the facilitators in different sites can be helpful to coordinate the overall activities in the sites and share experiences among facilitators on the process.

### ii. Follow up Visits and Skills Reinforcement Sessions

Follow up visits and skills reinforcement sessions for facilitators should be conducted on a quarterly basis to observe the process, conduct discussions with communities and facilitators and carry out skills reinforcement sessions for facilitators based on their field level experience, reflection and questions.

Meetings with facilitators need to be organized at least ones in a month. Facilitators will come with their reports for the month using reporting template and also collect volunteers' fee as agreed up on. Quarterly skill reinforcements are organized on quarterly bases.

Follow up visits and skills reinforcement sessions can be done with the support of national/regional CCs core trainers who have:

- Attended/facilitated training of trainers
- Facilitated Training of Facilitators
- Field level experience of at least one year

Major focus areas during follow up visits and skills reinforcement sessions are the following:

- Review reports and documentation

- Discuss the progress with implementing organization and facilitators
- Observe how the facilitation process has contributed to the changes at individual, community and organizational level
- Attend actual CC sessions and observe the process of facilitation and discussion
- Conduct skills reinforcement session for facilitators
- Reflect with facilitators on their insights gained from the communities regarding community capacity enhancement regarding FGM
- Review how facilitators utilize the various skills and tools acquired during the training
- Reflect with facilitator on the distinctions, skills tools and concepts they further need to understand and develop their competencies in the methodology
- Conduct actual reinforcement sessions on selected and identified tools, skills and other pertinent issues.

## 10. Strengthening Community Mobilization Efforts

### A. Experience Sharing Meetings

Experience sharing meetings can be organized periodically when CC participants in different sites, in a given locality (i.e. district or sub district) come together in one common place to share experiences and discuss issues of common concern at a larger community level. This can be done on a quarterly basis and is the best forum to create a sense of unity among all participants, create resonance and generate response on a wider scale. It would usually be of help to invite local administration representatives, influential community/traditional leaders, community level local traditional institutions and other support group from the community to inform them about the process and solicit the necessary support and assistance for the implementation of decisions coming out of CCs.

### B. Experience Sharing Visits

Experience sharing visits outside one's own community would be useful for strengthening the implementation of CCs. Arranging experience sharing visits to different communities (Both for facilitators and community members) would help to speed up the change

process and get new insights on how things can be done differently and also to get feedback and comments on one's process and way of working. The visits would contribute to strengthen the process and skills of facilitators as well as encouraging communities in their efforts.

## 11. Resonance

Reaching a larger community through resonance effect to scale up response to FGM is one of the working principles of CCs. Hence, every effort should be made to encourage CCs participants to share whatever information and lessons learned during CCs to their families, neighbors, relatives and other members of their community.

Following are some field level experience used by different organizations to promote resonance at community level:

- Requesting participants to establish contact and share information with at least five people in their neighborhood. Facilitators shall use “eyes and ears” of the CC team to cross check if the information is spreading and facilitators shall also encourage participants to share their experiences of how they are sharing information with family and friends around them.
- Information sharing and awareness raising efforts through house-to-house visit by community members themselves
- Using local radio stations to share discussions during CCs sessions to the larger community in the locality.

The implementing organizations and facilitators should be creative enough to design and come up with most effective and feasible way of transferring information, knowledge and change in their particular area of operation. Use of media is another aspect that has to be given due emphasis and attention.

## 12. Documentation of Social Change Indicators

Documentation of CCs process and content and more importantly the change processes taking place within communities is a very important task needs due attention. Hence,

facilitators should pay serious attention to it and document on a regular basis. Documentation is an ongoing process. As a principle documentation of outcomes of a CCs session should be completed before the next session with the same community.

In addition to written reports, photos, recordings, maps, other community-designed illustrations like songs, dramas and community stories are also used as a mode and source of documentation. As a matter of principle, communities should also be encouraged and assisted to do their own documentation.

In this approach, documentation must have the characteristics of a "thick description". A "thick description" goes well beyond observing and describing what actually takes place as an activity. In addition to this, the documentation in the context of CCs is also expected to provide detailed explanation of the context, process, emotions, feelings, sentiments, social and power relations and interactions between individuals and communities. (Please refer to Annex A.B and C below).

### 13. Social Change Indicators

Another important area is to identify and measure the change process taking place at individual, family and community level because of CC. Understandably, the task is difficult as most of the issues such as HTPs, GBVs are more of qualitative nature related to attitude, value and behavior. Furthermore, change processes taking place in one community can differ from another community. Hence, facilitators are advised to make note of these issues and be systematic in identifying the appropriate change process indicators for the community that they are working with. Communities themselves also be involved in identifying, measuring and evaluating changes taking place in their behaviors, attitudes and actions with regard to HTPs and GBVs.

It is very difficult to give standardized specific indicators for change processes for community living in different socio cultural context. However, the key ones are indicated in each session of the exercise and facilitators should take time to document those.

### 14. Managing and Supporting Emerging Initiative of CC Participants

An intrinsic outcome of CCs is the empowerment of communities to identify the issues and gaps that are most relevant and significant to them in their effort to deal with the concerns they identify. If we do in fact believe that local responses to the concerns should be based on the existing social dynamics and the concerns of local communities, supporting the upcoming community initiatives to very important. Communities should also make contributions but all the resources required to address these needs may not be readily available at community level. Hence, it would be very much important to find means and ways to tap resources to address the emerging needs. This accelerated the process of change. If possible, implementing organizations are advised to assign some budget for this activity while development proposal at the initial stage.

Secondly, it is also quite possible that participants of CCs might be interested in working together on other developmental issues beyond GBV and HTPs. Hence, every effort has to be made to encourage and support such kind of community initiatives by linking up with various governmental and non-governmental development organizations.

## 15. Duration and Sustainability of CCs Process

As indicated in the introductory part, CCs is a process that requires some reasonable period of time to productive the intended hope, transformation and results. The implementation of the methodology should also take into account the specific social and cultural dynamics and context in areas where it is being implemented. Hence , it would be misleading to try to give a fixed time limit as to when to complete the cycle and finish CCs in a given area, as the process is very much contextual and is influenced and determined by a number of factors.

In its broader context, CC can continue as long as communities have common concerns that they want to discuss and resolve in their day-to-day life. In this case, CCs should not necessarily be related only to the concern an organizations is targeting.

It can also help communities to work on other developmental issues and concerns. There is already filed-backed experience with certain communities in this line.



As a general advice, it is recommended that organizations should plan to implement CCs for a period of at least twelve months and then decide the next step of the process with communities after that. Planning CCs of three or six months (as it is the case with some implementing organizations) would be too short to generate practical and sustainable responses.

Regardless of the duration, the challenge for an implementing organization is to ensure that by the time it decides to withdraw its contribution from the process of CCs, communities are ready to won win? and run the process by them in the right direction.

Is should be noted and seriously underlined that the whole objective of CCs is to empower communities and whatever decisions and actions taken by communities during CC should be shared and owned by as many community members as possible to ensure its sustainability. For this to happen, implementing organization, facilitators and community members directly participating in conversations need to sit together and work out how to reach, inform and involve other community members, community leaders, local administration and other concerned and relevant stakeholders in the area. Working with and involving clan leaders, religious leaders, CBOs and local administrations have shown positive result in this regard.

## Annex A: Tool for Documentation Format for CC Facilitators

### **PART ONE**

Name of community: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of facilitators: \_\_\_\_\_

Community members (number, composition – men/women/youth/leaders, etc.):

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Areas where community members come from: \_\_\_\_\_

### **PART TWO**

Step in the Community Capacity Enhancement process:

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Tool(s) used: \_\_\_\_\_

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Difficulties/challenges encountered: \_\_\_\_\_

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Factors that contributed to the success of the meeting:

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Burning issues:

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Misconceptions:

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Issue being

discussed:

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Outcomes/changes seen or named by the

community:

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Agreements reached: Quotations (community  
voice/words): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Annex B: Check lists and methods for Community Visit

Below are some of check lists that can be used for facilitators to assess themselves or for TOTs to assess Community facilitators skill before skill reinforcement's sessions are organized. The tools need to be recorded against the step of the CCE-CC where the communities have arrived.

- Name of Community: \_\_\_\_\_
- Active listening: \_\_\_\_\_
- Strategic questioning: \_\_\_\_\_
- Reflection: \_\_\_\_\_
- Getting all to participate: \_\_\_\_\_
- Documentation: \_\_\_\_\_
- Paraphrasing: \_\_\_\_\_
- Self-introduction: \_\_\_\_\_
- Introduction of process \_\_\_\_\_
- Teamwork \_\_\_\_\_
- Historical timelines \_\_\_\_\_
- Transect walk \_\_\_\_\_
- Mapping \_\_\_\_\_
- Storytelling \_\_\_\_\_
- Community wall \_\_\_\_\_
- Facilitators' wall \_\_\_\_\_
- Five friends of planning \_\_\_\_\_
- Community activity plan \_\_\_\_\_
- Stocktaking \_\_\_\_\_
- Social capital analysis \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Hold discussions with community members

It is recommended that the follow-up team hold discussions with community members to assess perspectives on the CCE process and outcomes.

**Questions for community members may include the following:**

- In what ways has the facilitation team influenced community understanding of the subject matter
- What approach did the facilitation team use in working together with the community?
- What concerns/issues have been raised by the community in relation to the subject matters (WASH, security, gender or basic services)?
- Are Community Conversations influencing community attitudes, beliefs, and behavior's? In what ways?

**Annex C: Field level technical support**

Date of the on-site support visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of 1st Community Conversation: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of facilitating organization or government unit: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of facilitators being supported: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of facilitators being supported: \_\_\_\_\_

Tools and methods utilized ins providing support to facilitators \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Documentation**

Photos: \_\_\_\_\_

Extract of stories: \_\_\_\_\_

Process reports: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_