

# Community conversations

## What is the purpose?

Community conversations build awareness about the purpose and activities of the starter group, begins a community dialogue and visioning about children and child well-being, and leads to the identification of priority areas that lead towards planning. It is important to see the conversations not as a means to an end, but as a way to build momentum, understanding, buy in, and ongoing participation from different groups in the primary focus group. This is a key opportunity to lay a good foundation for structured participation and community ownership.

## objectives

- To develop an understanding of the purpose of community conversations
- To prepare the starter group for the process of conducting the community conversations
- To prepare the community conversation planners to coordinate the process of conducting the community conversations
- To plan the community conversations

### who facilitates

The DF identifies starter group members who can co-facilitate the planning of the community conversations. The DF works with the co-facilitator(s) to prepare for the meeting. Read through this entire guidance document before meeting.

Facilitators are identified to facilitate the community conversations. These facilitators and notetakers need to participate in the Facilitators Training Workshop prior to conducting the conversations.

## products

- Visual plan to carry out community conversations
- Planning templates completed
- Records of community conversations completed

**Note:** Keep all of the products developed in this meeting. They will be used again in the next meetings and in future steps of the Critical Path.

### who participates

Starter group members and other facilitators and notetakers from the community

### time allocation

Sessions 1 and 2 can be conducted at one meeting (approximately 4 hours) or two separate meetings. Additional meetings are scheduled with the community conversation planners as needed.

Session 3 will be conducted after all of the community conversations have taken place.

**Note:** It is important that the DF supports and facilitates a community-led process and not a WV-led process. From the beginning, DFs begin to coach and mentor starter group members.

## process

### Community conversations

session #	time	name of exercise	description of exercise
1	2 hours	<b>Planning for community conversations</b>	A session to help starter group members to understand the principles of community conversations and to begin planning for community conversations
2	2 hours	<b>Creating a visual plan for the community conversations</b>	A session to help starter group members select the groups, facilitators, and notetakers for the conversations and to create a visual calendar for planning

**session #1** Planning for community conversations**objective**

- To develop an understanding of the purpose of community conversations
- To prepare the starter group for the process of conducting the community conversations
- To plan the community conversations

**time span**

approximately 2 hours

**materials**

Print handouts of the overview of community conversations or create visuals to share

- flipchart paper
- markers
- coloured dots

**preparation**

Use the overview of community conversations, provided on page 9 and 10 of this guide to create a visual way of sharing about community conversations, including:

- What is a community conversation?
- What will the community gain from holding a community conversation?
- What is the purpose of the community conversation?
- Where can community conversations occur?
- Who to engage in community conversations?

**Introduction**

Stakeholders always have a wide range of understanding and perceptions of a problem. This exercise helps them to work out a common understanding of an issue or problem. The steps provide a framework for finding a solution that meets the most people's needs more completely than decisions made without such widespread participation.

**Recommended Process****Introducing community conversations**

Community conversations is a way that we can listen to different community members about their thoughts on child well-being in the area.

Use the visual you have created to share with the starter group about community conversations and provide an overview. Discuss with the group about:

- What is a community conversation?
- What will the community gain from holding a community conversation?
- What is the purpose of the community conversation?
- Where can community conversations occur?
- Who to engage in community conversations?

**Overview of the process for conducting community conversations**

After sharing about community conversations, provide an overview of steps involved in conducting the conversations.

1. Select the questions and visuals that will be used with all the groups in your community conversations.
2. Select planners from the starter group members who will take responsibility for all the preparations and coordination of the conversations.
3. Create a visual plan of the conversations. This includes:
  - Choosing the groups that will be asked to be involved
  - Choosing facilitators and notetakers for each group
  - Selecting times to meet with each group for the conversations
4. Confirm availability of the facilitators and notetakers
5. Organise and conduct the training workshop for the facilitators and notetakers
6. Schedule the time with each of the groups for the conversations
7. Gather the information from each of the conversations
8. Synthesise the information gathered and prepare the information in a way that can be presented at the community summit

### Creating questions and visuals to be used for all community conversations

Show the starter group an example of a visual that was created and used for community conversations in the country of Laos. Describe how the tool works:

*“This is a **flipchart picture**. It helps to stimulate discussion in the community conversations. On the front of each flipchart page is a picture of a scene related to child well-being.”*



example

*“On the back of each picture is a set of questions related to the picture.”*

*“During the discussions, a facilitator will show the pictures to the participants and ask them the questions on the back.”*

*“The pictures help the participants think about their answers.”*

*“Notetakers write answers that the participants give during the discussion session.”*

example

In our community, which groups of children attend school regularly?

Which groups of children do not attend school regularly?

What are some reasons why they don't go to school?

## Planning for community conversations notes

Explain that they will also create visuals, one for each series of questions they decide to ask at the community conversations. Identify an artist who can create illustrations that can be reproduced and used at all the community conversations. Starter group members may know a local artist who could illustrate the visuals.

Translate the questions into the local language. Use the same set of questions at each community conversation so that the information can be brought back together and summarized by the starter group.

### Suggested visuals and questions:

1. Illustrate a picture of healthy children playing or doing something physically active.

*Question:*

How do children in this community get the food they need to grow strong?

2. Illustrate a picture of a child laying at home (i.e. maybe on a mat or in a way that is culturally appropriate).

*Questions:*

Are there some children who are not well enough to do the things that other children do? Can you tell me more about that?

3. Illustrate a picture of a child who is not going to school who is looking at other children who are going to school. (i.e. maybe the child is looking in the school window at other children in the classroom; maybe the child is looking at children in their school uniforms walking to school).

*Questions:*

In our community, which groups of children attend school regularly? What helps them to go to school?

Which groups of children do not attend school regularly? What are some reasons why they don't go to school?

4. Illustrate a picture of a child walking home from school who is unhappy.

*Question:*

What might have happened at school that made this child sad?

5. Illustrate a picture of a family spending time together (i.e. maybe eating a meal all together).

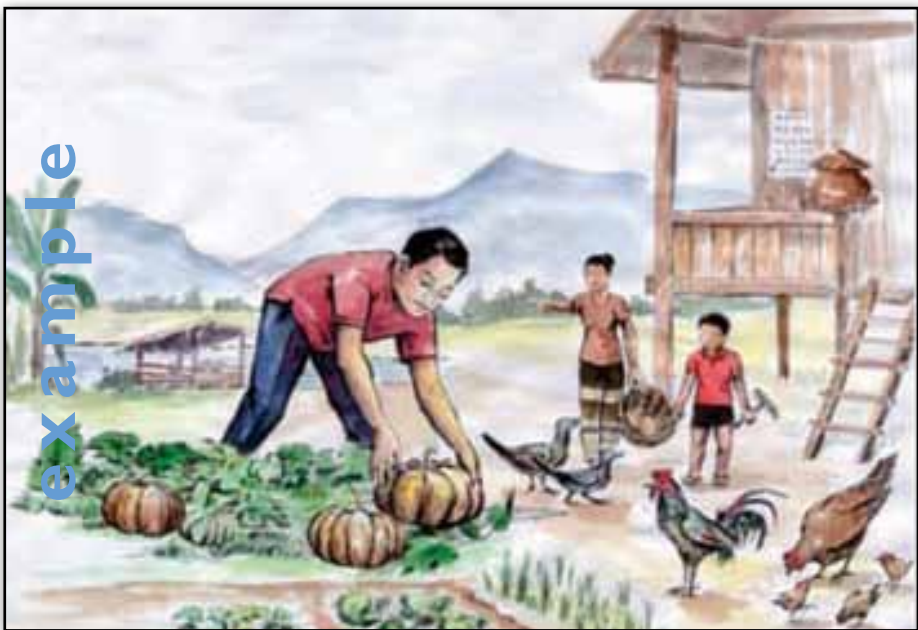
*Question:*

What makes life good for children?

What children have the most difficult lives in the community?

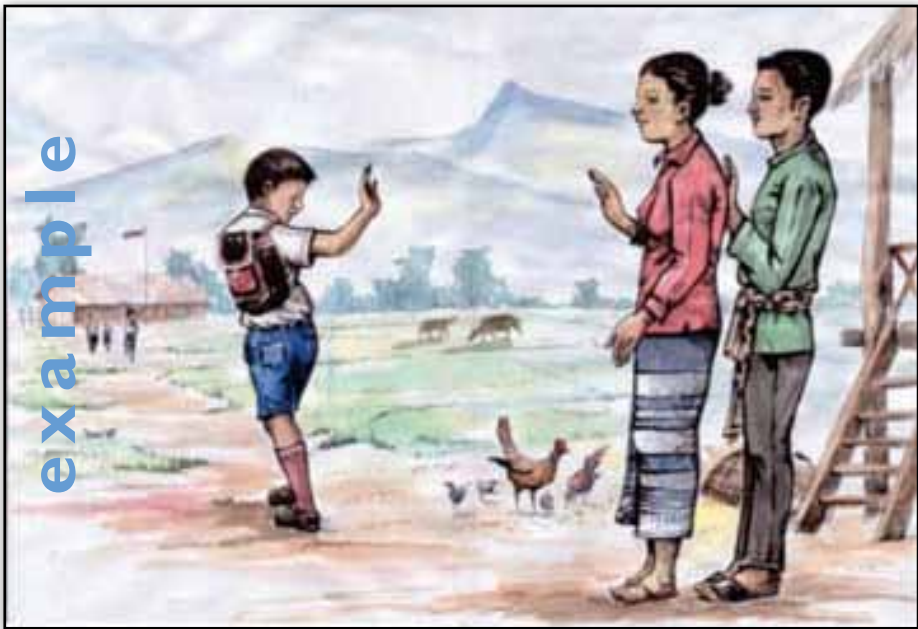
Examples of Visuals and Questions

example



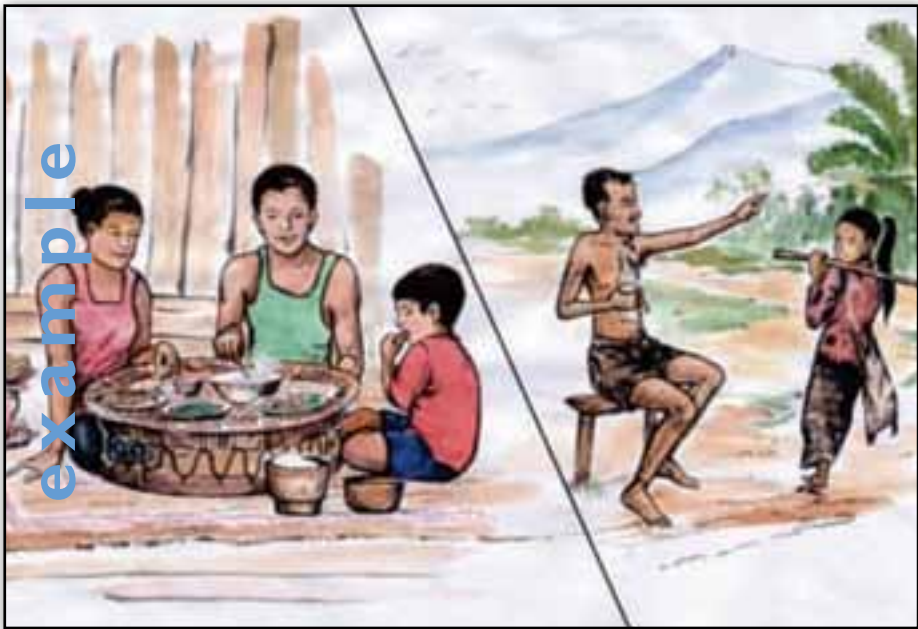
**What are ways that some people have used to make sure our children get the food they need to be healthy and smart?**

example



**In our community, which kinds of children attend school regularly and which kinds of children do not attend school regularly? Explain why or why not.**

example



**What makes children happy and successful in our communities?**  
**What difficulties do children face in our communities?**

## Planning for community conversations notes

### Picking planners for the community conversations

Planners are critical to the success of the community conversations. Planners are members of the starter group who will serve to prepare for and coordinate all of the community conversations. Ensure that individuals volunteering to serve as planners have the time to commit to these responsibilities.

Planners will be responsible for the following activities:

1. Review the process and all of the facilitation guidance.
2. Use the planning templates to monitor follow-up actions needed between planning meetings.
3. Facilitate the creation of a visual plan, the selection of groups, and the selection of facilitators and notetakers.
4. Create copies of the completed planning templates for all starter group members.
5. Invite the different groups to be a part of the community conversations and arrange the time and the place for the conversation.
6. Make contact with potential facilitators and notetakers and confirm their availability.
7. Organise the training workshop for facilitators and notetakers. See the **Facilitator's Training Workshop** Facilitation Guidance for more information.
8. Monitor the planned conversations to ensure that the facilitators are arriving on time, the venues are appropriately prepared, and the community members are clear on the purpose and the outcomes.
9. Use the planning template and the visual plan to review and evaluate the plan and process.
10. Create a portfolio of the community conversations, visual plan, photos, flipcharts used, information gathered, facilitators' notes, groups engaged, lessons learned, etc.

**session #2** Creating a visual plan for the community conversations**objective**

- To produce a visual plan of the people and organisations involved in the community conversations

**time span**

2 hours

**materials**

- flipchart paper
- markers
- coloured dots
- coloured paper
- overview of community conversations
- findings from the Social Mapping exercise
- findings from the Spider Diagram exercise
- copies of the planning templates (p. 11 and 12)

**product**

Visual plan to carry out community conversations  
Planning templates completed

**Recommended Process**

Build a visual plan with the group during the planning meetings. This will ensure that all members of the group can participate equally. This is particularly important if literacy is an issue among starter group members.

Building this visual together will help the group come to consensus, make changes as necessary while the plan, is in process and evaluate the plan when it is completed.

The planners for the community conversations can transfer the information on the visual plan to the planning templates (on page 11 and 12) and complete any other details that need to be addressed.

The visual plan will include information about what groups will be involved, the facilitators and notetakers for each group, and a calendar showing who will do what when.

**1. Choose groups involved in community conversations**

First, the starter group decides on the groups that are going to be included for community conversations. Not everyone that is invited will be able to attend, and in some cases more people will turn up than was planned for!

Review the section “Who should be invited to participate in a community conversation?” in the ‘What is a community conversation?’ document on page 10 for detailed information on whom to invite.

Review the findings from the Social Mapping exercise conducted by the starter group. Include as many groups of people in the community as possible. Discuss the best way to bring groups together to meet and conduct a conversation.

Check to see if children, youth, or any vulnerable groups are missing. The most effective conversations are had when people have a level of trust and relationship. This is particularly important when including the excluded or most vulnerable sections of the population. Consider how to organise groups of children and most vulnerable so that they feel comfortable to speak and share.

**Once you have agreed on the groups, create icons or visual representations for each of the groups who will participate in the community conversations.** The icons can be placed on the planning calendar during step 3 of this session.

Use culturally appropriate ways to send out invitations for the community conversations. The most effective way is to talk with individuals and groups to organize a time and place that may work for them. The mapping process will give you a sense of who to meet with to organize the conversation.

**2. Facilitators and notetakers for the community conversations**

Second, the starter group decides on the facilitators and notetakers for each conversation. A workshop will be conducted to train the facilitators and notetakers on how to facilitate the community conversations.

Facilitators are responsible for facilitating the conversations by helping the group to stay on topic and hold to its timeframes for the conversation. The facilitator will work with the notetaker to transcribe the large flip chart pages onto the conversation record handout (see page 13).

## Creating a visual plan notes

Notetakers do not contribute to the conversation but focus on writing down what is said by each participant. It is important to select someone who has legible printing.

Facilitators may come from the starter group, other community-based organisations operating in the area, the local church, youth workers, or school personnel. Volunteers either from the formal or informal community groups identified, or within the priority areas, can also serve as facilitators for the conversations.

It's important to consider the groups that have been chosen in step 1, so that the most appropriate facilitator can be chosen for each conversation.

Note that some groups, such as the most vulnerable, may require proactive engagement, as it may not be the norm for their inclusion in community planning processes.

Simple questions with starter group members will help to identify appropriate facilitators:

- Who has the experience working with youth and children?
- Who has experience in guiding group conversations?
- Who feels comfortable working with (x) group?
- Who would like to help document the conversations?

**Create icons or visual representation for each facilitator and notetaker. Place them on the visual plan by the groups for which they will facilitate.** The icons can be placed on the planning calendar during step 3 of this session.

### 3. Create a calendar that represents the length of time needed to plan and hold the community conversations.

Create icons or visual representation for each of the planners involved in the process and other starter group members who will be involved.

Develop a visual calendar or timeline to plan the conversations. For each conversation planned, document:

- Location of each conversation
- Date and time for each conversation
- Social groups included for each conversation
- Facilitator and notetaker for each conversation
- Starter group members assisting at each conversation.

Other important dates and planning can also be included on the timeline, such as the date, time, and location of the facilitators training workshop.

If possible, post the timeline in a location that can be visited and updated by all the starter group members, especially the planners.

Notes: You will want to have materials on hand at each planning meeting to build additional icons or visual representations. You may be adding additional groups, locations, or individuals to the plan at each meeting.



## What is a community conversation?

### **What is a community conversation?**

A community conversation brings together diverse groups of people to engage in a dialogue about a vision and priorities for improving child well-being in the area.

The people who participate in a community conversation can all live in the same community or may be a community of people who work together at the state or local level on behalf of young children and their families.

Participants share what they think and feel, and listen to what others think and feel. The conversation can be catalyzed by a series of questions, along with some information shared to stimulate reaction to the questions, and even visual, audio or real time drama or sketches which stimulate debate and discussion. The key is to facilitate each conversation using the same questions so that the information collected leads to common conclusions, shared vision and prioritization.

Differences of opinion are respectfully listened to. The goal of the conversation is not to reconcile the differences but to listen to and appreciate them, looking for areas of common ground that lead to specific recommendations on the issues that the conversations focus on.

### **What will the community gain from holding a community conversation?**

- An opportunity to participate in shaping the vision and priorities for improving child well-being and fulfilling their rights
- An avenue to bring a diverse group of community members together to hold a dialogue about common hopes and concerns, creating a potential springboard for community-based action
- An opportunity to increase the commitment of all sectors of the community to children across their life cycle stages, and increase their understanding of child well-being

### **What is the purpose of the community conversations?**

The information generated during the conversation will be used to help inform the development of the priority area development plan.

Communities can also use information generated during the conversation as they work together to create local approaches to building communities and households that care for, protect and nurture children and young people.

### **Where can community conversations occur?**

- In schools or homes
- In community centers or libraries
- In places of worship
- At meetings of existing partnerships, multipurpose collaborative bodies, or specialized child and youth services
- In government buildings
- Any other place where participants will feel welcome

## Community conversations

### Who to engage in community conversations?

The starter group along with community volunteers trained to facilitate the conversations.

A group of 15 to 20 people who are interested in discussing how their community can become a better place for children.

Participant groups should represent the diversity (age, gender, cultural, racial, economic, geographic, etc.) of the community. In order to ensure that the voice of children, youth and the most marginalized or excluded groups are heard, it is best for conversations to be held with friendship or kinship groups, or age-based groups. This provides a safe place for people to share their views. There may be situations where a mix of people is appropriate and can lead to rich sharing, but this should not be done at the expense of excluding the most vulnerable.

Groups could include:

- Parents of children
- Children and youth from ages 8-10 upwards
- Clan or kinship groups
- Marginalised groups or groups that suffer discrimination
- Members of the broader community who don't specifically work on behalf of young children but who believe that improving opportunities for children and youth is critical for the development of the community. Examples are: farmers, local police department members, juvenile court judges, business leaders, parks and recreation employees, etc.
- Individuals who are paid to work with children and their families. Examples are: preschool teachers, elementary and secondary school teachers, childcare providers, or pediatric health care providers, etc.
- Public and private sector directors/administrators, program supervisors, and other leaders of public and private enterprise

## Planning template for community conversations

Review the visual mapping exercise again after your plan is completed to ensure that all appropriate groups (including the most vulnerable and youth) are included in the plan for the community conversations.

Name of group	Group contact (s)	Meeting Place for Conversation	Chosen Method for Conversation	Date and Time of Conversation	Facilitator(s)	Materials Needed	Date Completed

## Planning template for community conversations - Facilitators and Notetakers

Facilitators and notetakers assigned to conduct community conversations are important assets for successful community conversations. Ensure that their schedules are realistic, that they have the support they need from the starter group and that they are able to meet with group pleaders before the community conversation takes place.

Name of facilitator and notetaker	Contact Information	Facilitator Training	Name of Assigned Group(s) to Facilitate	Date and Time for Planning Meeting with Group Leaders	Planning Meeting of Conversation	Date and Time of Conversation	Notes Collected

## Record of our community conversation

Conversation location: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of attendees: \_\_\_\_\_ Type of Group: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part One - What is currently happening in my community that helps children to succeed?  
(What are the resources and traditions that help children to do well?)**

**Part Two - What is currently happening with children that I believe needs to change or be different?  
(What are the most important priorities, especially for families?)**