

Exploring our context - part I

What is the purpose?

The purpose of this guidance is to explore the starter group's understanding and definition of child well-being in the primary focus area. Based on this discussion, the starter group begins identifying stakeholders who are important for children to thrive. Using the Balloon game and Thread game, the starter group also begins to discuss vulnerability by identifying assets and protective factors in their communities. The development facilitator (DF) shares messages about World Vision, including basic information about Child Sponsorship.

objectives

- To increase understanding about all the members of the starter group, including World Vision
- To explore and increase understanding of child well-being in the local context
- To create a common understanding of what an enabling environment looks like when children thrive
- To define life stages in the local context
- To promote understanding about children who don't have enough support and protective factors
- To identify assets that support and protect children in the area
- To identify stakeholders in the community that contribute towards child well-being

who participates

Starter group members

time allocation

approximately 4 hours

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.

products

- Drawings of children with statements about child well-being
- Lists of assets and protective factors
- Descriptions of defined life stages
- List of stakeholders that are contributing to child well-being

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 facilitates

The DF identifies starter group members who can co-facilitate. The DF works with the co-facilitator(s) to prepare for the meeting. Each facilitator is clear about what exercises they are facilitating or co-facilitating. Print a copy of this facilitation guidance for each facilitator. See note below.

process

Exploring our context - part I

exercise #	time	name of exercise	description of exercise
1	30 minutes	Introductions	Starter group members introduce themselves. The DF shares about World Vision using the message box and provides an initial overview about child sponsorship.
2	45 minutes	What makes a child thrive?	An exercise where starter group members begin to explore what child well-being looks like in their communities
3	45 minutes	What are the life stages of our children?	An exercise where starter group members identify different development milestones at different ages of children growing up in their communities
4	30 minutes	How do we support our children?	A game with the starter group members using balloons to show how some children can slip through the community's 'web of support'
5	1 hour	What assets help our children to thrive?	A game with five volunteers using thread to show how assets in the community create support and protection for children
6	30 minutes	Who helps our children thrive?	An exercise with the starter group members using the drawings from exercise #2 to explore stakeholders who contribute towards child well-being

exercise #1 Introduction to World Vision

objective

To increase understanding about all the members of the starter group, including World Vision

time span

30 minutes

materials

- WV Message Box
- Sponsorship communication plan

Recommended Process

Follow any cultural or local protocols for opening the starter group meeting.

This is the first meeting for the starter group, so give adequate time for introductions, ensuring that each person gets equal time.

If appropriate, use a popular ice breaker to get everyone ready.

Ask each person to introduce themselves and to explain who they represent.



Tips for Facilitators

- *From the first meeting with the starter group, the DF works to create a respectful environment.*
- *It is important for the DFs to observe group dynamics. Some representatives might not be accepted at first and it may take effort by the DF, slowly over time, and over multiple meetings to see greater acceptance and participation by all representatives.*

The DF will also introduce themselves and share about World Vision. Limit the introduction to the same amount of time that other starter group members had to introduce themselves. Use the information from the **Message Box** and the sponsorship communication plan to share basic information about World Vision.

exercise #2 What makes a child thrive?

objective

To create a common understanding of what an enabling environment looks like when children thrive

time span

45 minutes

materials

- flipchart paper
- markers
- masking tape

product

Drawings of children with notes on the factors that influence child well-being

note

The statements and descriptions about child well-being developed in this exercise will be used again.

Ecological model

What is this tool?

This tool helps participants explore the factors (or reasons) and influences that affect child well-being in the local context.

Introduction

“Now, we will be doing a series of exercises that will help us to create a common understanding and definitions for moving forward together.”

“This first exercise will help us to understand how we think about child well-being.”

Recommended Process

Action: Divide into small groups (of approximately 3 or 4 people). Provide each group with a piece of flipchart paper and some markers.

Ask each group to draw a child in the middle of the flipchart paper.

Ask participants to think about children who are doing well in their community. Ask them:

“When you think about the children that are doing well, what are the factors or reasons that help them to do well? What influences their well-being?”

Action: Ask each group to draw or write around the picture of the child these factors (or reasons) and influences.

Ask each group to share their drawings and the factors and influences that they identified as affecting child well-being in their communities.

After each group has shared, discuss the similarities and differences between the groups.

Highlight a few key points:

- The people in a child’s life are critical to child well-being. People that were identified in the drawings, like parents, teachers, siblings, and peers are all critical to a child’s well-being and development. Look at the groups’ drawings and highlight some of the people that they identified as important for child well-being.
- The institutions in a child’s life are also important for child well-being. Institutions like schools, health clinics, preschools, churches, or after-school programmes are all examples of institutions that are important for child well-being. Look at the groups’ drawings and highlight some of the institutions that they identified as important for child well-being.
- The context or environment of the child affects how they develop. Just focusing on children, alone, won’t address their ability to grow and develop successfully. People and institutions are critical for child well-being.

Conclusion

“This drawings developed in this exercise will form the basis of our shared understanding of what child well-being looks like in this area.”

exercise #3 What are the life stages of our children?

objective

To develop an agreed set of life stages for this context

time span

45 minutes

materials

- flipchart paper
- markers
- masking tape

preparation

Create one flipchart sheet for each group using Figure 1 as a guide for headings and layout. (Both words and numerals should be written in the local language.)

product

Descriptions of defined life stages

Life stages

What is this tool?

This tool helps participants to explore how life stages are defined within different cultures and contexts.

Introduction

- Life cycle stages are a way of understanding the major changes that occur as children grow and develop. There are some stages that are universal.
- The different stages in the lives of children are also socially, politically, and culturally defined.
- When and how quickly children pass through these stages depends on the individual child as well as the local social and cultural norms.

“Let’s explore how children develop in our community and what’s expected of them at different ages.”

Recommended Process

Divide participants into small groups (no more than five in a group).

Show the participants an example of the flipcharts they will be using and use this to demonstrate the task.

Figure 1: Example of prepared flipchart sheet

Age (years)	Female	Male	All
65+			
50			
40			
30			
20			
19			
18			
17			
16			
15			
14			
13			
12			
11			
10			
9			
8			
7			
6			
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			
0			
-0*			

* optional

Life stages notes

Ask them to mark the stages in life for girls/women, boys/men and all people in their own society by marking stages, rather than ages.

Ask them to mark it on the chart in their own language and to write what is expected of people at that age.

Repeat the instructions and ask if participants understand.

Emphasise that they should think about what terms and ideas are used in their own community/society and that they must work only in their own language.

Make sure each group has markers and ask them to begin.

In the first few minutes, it is important to check that groups are following instructions and using their own languages.

When all groups have finished, ask them to tape the sheets to the wall.

Ask a volunteer from each group to share their chart with all workshop participants.

When the groups have finished:

- Ask for any additions from other members of that group.
- Ask for comments/questions from other participants.
- Make your own comments/questions (if any).
- Move to the next chart.
- Finish with more general discussion, with participants still standing.

Summarise by highlighting similarities and differences from the different groups.

Conclusion

“This exercise helps to create a common understanding of the life stages of children in this context. We will come back to these descriptions in a later meeting when we discuss child well-being outcomes at the different life stages.”

exercise #4 How do we support our children?

objective

To promote understanding about children who don't have enough support and protective factors

time span

approximately 30 minutes

materials

- medium-size balloons
- flipchart paper
- markers

product

Notes from the group discussion

Balloon Game

What is this tool?

This tool uses a game to encourage initial dialogue about children who may not have the kinds of support or protective factors needed to thrive.

Recommended Process

To begin the exercise, ask the group to think about community supports and protective factors for children.

Action: Give a balloon to everyone in the group. Make sure the balloons are of a medium size and not too small.

Ask everyone to inflate his or her balloon.

Action: Each participant inflates one balloon.

Ask them to toss their balloons into the air and to keep the balloons in the air by tapping them gently. Tell the group:

"When we support the balloon we are giving it protection and support."

"Each time we tap the balloon, we are supporting it with protective factors."

Enabling a child or young person to develop and reach their dreams requires support, protection, opportunity, and love.

"Each balloon represents a child or youth in the community."

Ask the participants to keep all of the 'balloon children and young people' off of the floor for 45 seconds. As a community, they will need to do their best to keep all of the 'balloon children' off the floor.

The only rule is that they can only tap any one balloon no more than twice in a row. Repeat the instructions and make sure that everyone understands.

Action: The participants will attempt to keep all the balloons off the floor. Various degrees of chaos will erupt. Watch and wait for 45 seconds.

Ask them to hold the balloons that are in the air and look down at their feet. Explain:

"We have done this activity in rooms for as many as 1200 people and as small as 15, and we generally see the same result. We see that in any given community, between 25 to 35% of the balloons are on the floor. Now the good news is that we are successful with between 65 to 75% of our children. The not so good news is that between 25 to 35% of our children are hitting the floor at any given time."

"Do you think you can do better? I will give you seven minutes to come up with a system that will keep all of the children off of the floor for 45 seconds. You can do it as one large group, break into small groups, or any other creative solution you have. However, the ONLY rule is that you must tap the balloons and each person can only tap any one balloon no more than twice in a row."

"You now have seven minutes to design, practice, and create a system which keeps all of the balloons off of the floor for 45 seconds."

Action: After a seven minute wait, ask the community to pick all the balloons up off the floor and prepare to be timed.

Ask them to start.

Action: Watch what people are doing. As the facilitator, you will notice that people are working hard to keep the balloons off the floor. They are hustling, jumping, on their knees, on their backs, and diving to keep the balloons up in the air. Watch for 45 seconds.

Balloon game notes

Ask them to stop. You may need to speak loudly to be heard. Ask them to hold the balloons they have that are in the air. Then ask them to look at down at their feet. Note that there are fewer balloons on the floor than last time but some always seem to slip through. Ask:

“Who in your community are like the balloons that are left on the floor?”

Ask the group to describe how this exercise is like working together in their community to take care of their children and youth. Allow for individuals to share feedback and examples.

exercise #5 What assets help our children to thrive?

objective

To identify assets that support and protect children in the area

time span

approximately 1 hour

materials

- thread, string, or yarn
- flipchart paper
- markers
- masking tape
- medium-size balloons (inflated)

product

Lists of assets and protective factors

Thread Game

What is this tool?

This tool helps participants to explore and identify local assets that support and protect children in the area.

Recommended Process

Action: Arrange five chairs in a five-point star at the front of the room. Ask five volunteers to come forward and to sit in the chairs. Ask each volunteer to share their name with the group.

Tell the group:

“We know that the more people that get involved in the life of a young person, the stronger that young person’s ‘web of support’ will be. Whoever these people may be, they create the foundation for a caring ‘web of support.’”

“I will go around the room and ask each of you to identify one support, one asset, or one thing that children need to succeed. For each asset you name, the yarn will be passed, randomly, between the five volunteers sitting in the chairs. They will build a ‘web of support’. Each strand represents one protective factor or asset.”

“After we get warmed up with the game, anyone can call out a support or asset.”

Ask the five volunteers to each hold the strand(s) of yarn with one hand and to pass the ball of thread with the other hand. Ask the volunteers to pass the ball of thread randomly around and across the web for each asset identified and to keep the yarn taut (tight).

Action: Give positive feedback for answers and repeat the asset identified (if you think that some people couldn’t hear the suggestion). Keep track of the number of assets identified. Write them on a flip chart. (Sometimes it is good to have someone else counting for you and letting you know how many strands you have. Or you could simply look at the web of support and know that if you see a star with a border, you have 10 assets. When you see a star with at least 6 strings “doubled up” you have at least 16 assets. When the web is pretty solid, you probably have more than 30).



Tips for Facilitators

- Encourage the participants to answer and support them by asking them for an asset a different way, i.e. what is something that helped YOU grow up strong and healthy? – or allow them to ask others for their ideas.

Thread game notes

Action: Stop when ten strands/assets make up the web of support.

“Children who have ten assets or less are often referred to as ‘at-risk’. It could be that there are some of these youth in your community as well.”

Testing the Safety Net

Action: Drop a balloon (a metaphor for a child or teen) onto the web.

“Notice that the balloon gets caught in some areas.” (Always focus on the positive first). “Also notice how the balloon falls through some holes because there just aren’t enough strands in the safety net.”

“What does this child need to fill in some of the holes?”

LISTEN – Wait for someone in the audience to respond “More assets...”

“That’s right. Let’s keep building. What else do children need to succeed...”

Action: Continue to identify assets, while building a strand for each. (If the audience is having trouble, you can continue to ask, “What else do kids need to succeed” or say “Think back when you were a young person, what did you need in your life to succeed?” Continue to identify assets while building a strand for each.)

Action: Stop at 18. Drop a balloon on the safety net again.

“In some countries, 18 is the average number of assets that exist for youth.”

“As you can see, this web of support is stronger than the one with only ten assets, however, there are still areas where this balloon can fall through the cracks, just as a child with 18 assets still may be at risk.”

“How can we add a strand that makes this hole smaller, or that hole smaller?”

Action: Draw your finger across the place where a strand needs to be. The answer that will usually come is “Add more people.” Ask the people who are holding up the strands to invite four to 6 more people to join the circle. They will usually ask people to join in by name. And, this is your opportunity to talk to the audience about the power of inviting people into the lives of youth, by name.

Action: Continue building the web of support. Keep asking, “What do kids need to succeed?” Add another 12 assets. Now we have more than 30 assets.

“Now we have more than 30 strands in our web of support, which represent 30 assets in a child’s life.”

Action: Place the balloon (the child/teen) upon the web of support. It will now be very difficult for the balloon to accidentally hit the floor. Compare this web of support to the first two and ask the audience what they think.

“We have shown that one thing the web of support does is keep the balloon from hitting the floor. It acts as a safety net for our balloons, and our children.”

“This is the power of assets. We will never be able to legislate values, morality, nor decency. We may always have alcohol in our communities, (and other problems relevant to that community). However, with people working together to build assets in youth, we are able build a community where youth can succeed and thrive.”

Action: Push a balloon through the web of support.

“Some youth may still find a way to fall through this supportive web, no matter how strong it is.”

Action: Talk about some of the metaphors you see in the supportive web.

Thread game notes

Ask the audience to reflect on the symbolism of the web for them or maybe a story that the web represents.

Action: After this discussion, ask participants to lay yarn carefully flat on floor. Ask them to try to preserve the integrity of the web.

What have you learned from the exercise?

- From the web exercise – draw or list the things that your community currently does to support children to become successful.
- What traditions, practices help children develop well?
- What are the supportive factors in your community that keep the ‘balloons’ in the air?

Work in small groups to discuss the following questions:

- What are the risk factors that you want to address or change?
- What are the gaps or areas of concern that you have for children in your community?

Give time for each group to share their gaps and priorities. Let the other groups comment, agree, question, and discuss.

- What further information is needed to understand these issues?

Explain to the starter group that we'll all be participating in a process to talk to groups in the community about child well-being in the coming weeks. Our experience in exploring our understanding of child well-being and the assets of children in our communities helps us to prepare for this.

exercise #6 Who helps our children thrive?

objective

To identify stakeholders in the community that contribute towards child well-being

time span

30 minutes

materials

- blank white cards
- markers
- masking tape

product

List of stakeholders that are contributing to child well-being

Introduction

“We’ve now talked about how we know when children are doing well in our communities and we’ve identified some of the assets and protective factors that create a healthy environment for children to grow.”

“Let’s finish today by going back through the exercises and identifying the different individuals, groups, and organisations that are helping children in our communities.”

Recommended Process

Post the drawings created during the ‘Ecological model’ exercise (#2). Make sure the notes of assets and protective factors are also visibly posted on the walls.

Ask participants to use the previous exercises to identify specific individuals, groups, or organisations who are helping children in the area.

Explain that these are ‘stakeholders’ that may want to join the starter group or become a potential partner. The starter group will want to gather information from stakeholders about the work the stakeholder is doing and their perspectives on child well-being.

Ask a recorder to write each ‘stakeholder’ on a blank card and post the cards on the wall.

Conclusion

Explain that this is an initial exercise to identify stakeholders and the group will create a complete list of stakeholders at a future meeting.

Check to see if there are any outstanding questions before closing the meeting.