

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 2. What Do I Bring to the Community?

Note: Users of this tool may want to adapt the Afghanistan example (which pertains to a Muslim country) to their own context or geographic region. For example, participants in the Middle East might use Iraq as the example, or participants in Africa might use the example of Somalia.

To engage deeply with communities and develop a reflective practice, we first need to become aware of what we each bring psychologically to the community. Each humanitarian worker enters the community with a host of assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, values, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors, and these shape the ways in which we engage with community people and in turn are seen by local people. Depending on our orientation, what we bring can build trust and relationships, or it can put people off or marginalize them.

This tool aims to help you think through what you bring and to reflect on the implications of this and how you present yourself in interactions with community people. We start with an example of a hypothetical child protection worker from another country who is entering a community on behalf of an NGO.

Example: What an International Child Protection Worker is Likely to Bring to Afghanistan

John is a 35-year-old child protection worker who holds a master's degree in Social Work from the prestigious Johns-Hopkins University. Born and raised in Iowa (in the mid-US) and living now in New York City, John is a fervent Christian yet respects other people's faiths. As a child protection specialist for an international NGO named "Well Child," he is passionate about child rights. He has worked in several countries outside the US but has never visited Asia.

John has been assigned by Well Child to visit Northern Afghanistan in 2004 to support national Afghan teams who have been working in rural villages and who are well respected. John has learned from the national staff that girl suicide has sharply increased in the area since more girls are being forced to get married at young ages (mostly 15–16 years of age) to much older men whom they do not like.

The international office of Well Child appreciates John's expertise in mental health and psychosocial issues and has asked him to visit some villages in order to help learn about the situation and help develop an intervention that could improve the mental health and psychosocial well-being of girls in the area.

Using the space below, take five minutes to list out some of the main things that John likely brings to this task. These can be positive or negative. You may want to think about things like his background and likely beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, values, etc. Since you do not know John, you will need to speculate a bit in doing this and list at least two things for each category.

Write below:

POSITIVE: _____

NEGATIVE: _____

Now take a couple of minutes to think how these might mesh or not mesh with beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. in rural villages in northern Afghanistan. Please write down below a couple of key points. (Or, if you are in a group, this could be a topic for group discussion.)

Write below:

Next, reflect for a moment on the likely power dynamics associated with John's entry into the villages. How is John positioned in regard to power relative to the villagers? How are the villagers positioned relative to John?

Write below:

Here are some important points related to the preceding example:

What John brings. John brings his American background and identity, which can have significant implications in Afghanistan, particularly since in 2004, US troops were fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan and were also occupying Iraq. He also brings his Christian background and orientation with him, which potentially clashes with Afghans' fervent Muslim faith, identity, and practice. With respect to beliefs and assumptions, John likely believes that men and women are equal or ought to be equal, and he may believe that forced early marriage is a violation of children's rights. He probably assumes that 15- and 16-year-old girls are children and therefore ought to be protected and that girls should be able to make their own decisions, without coercion.

From his studies, he knows that forced early marriage can harm girls' mental health and psychosocial well-being as well as their physical health. He likely assumes that to some extent, his understanding of mental health and human relationships applies in Afghanistan. He also knows that since forced marriage violates girls' rights, it has to be stopped. Understanding the importance of case management, he likely thinks about how to identify girls at risk and how to support them and prevent suicide. Also, his child protection knowledge may lead him to see forced marriage as both a child protection issue and a mental health issue.

John's attitudes, values, and expectations about the issue of forced early marriages are very likely not neutral. Like most child protection workers, he probably sees forced early marriage as repugnant, highly harmful to girls, and as something that needs urgently to be stopped or prevented. Although he may have a positive attitude toward individual Afghan people or families, he probably views Afghan gender norms with disdain, seeing them as supporting the mistreatment of and discrimination against girls and women. Being a Christian, he values helping, compassion, and individual dignity, and he sees suicide as wrong.

John's expectations are that with some analysis, explanation, and appropriate intervention, local people will see the girls' suicides as a serious problem and will work with Well Child to prevent it. He may also expect that he, being the expert, should design the indicated intervention for addressing the problem in a manner that fits with international standards on child protection and mental health and psychosocial support. Being an experienced child protection worker, though, he expects long term change in social norms will occur slowly. Guided by his role within Well Child, he acts in a professional manner and asks questions that aim to clarify the scale and causes of the problem, and he analyzes with the Afghan staff what could be done to address the problem.

Power. Relative to poor Afghan villagers, John is quite wealthy. Also, he works for an international NGO that people likely see as wealthy and powerful, and he probably entered villages in an expensive vehicle that local people could not possibly afford. Having been educated in a Western university, holding a graduate degree, and designated as a child protection specialist, John holds power related to knowledge and technical expertise. Most likely, he would be seen by Afghan villagers as bringing Western science to their communities. Further, he is male, and Afghan social norms privilege men over women. For all these reasons, John holds and will likely be seen by Afghan people as powerful, and they may allow him to impose outside ideas that may fit poorly within the Afghan context. Even if he is humble in his approach, local people see his power and may keep silent about any doubts they have about his approach.

Congruence. There is likely at least some partial agreement or congruence between John’s views and the communities’ views. For example, both likely view the girls’ suicides as horrible and want to prevent them. However, the points of divergence may be much greater than are the points of convergence. Rural villagers in Afghanistan do not view 15- and 16-year-old girls as children but as adults who are marriageable, and the villagers will probably not be supporters of universal child rights. Also, community people will likely not see the girls’ marriages to older men as problematic but as an acceptable practice that fits Afghan norms and the economic realities of their families’ situation. They may also believe that a girl’s primary responsibility is to obey her parents and set aside her own wishes in favor of the greater good for the family.

Although they might be reluctant to say so directly, the villagers may not like the idea of Well Child trying to stop and prevent the families from marrying their daughters off before 18 years of age. Indeed, they may fear that it will bring too many Western approaches and Christian ideas that could weaken children’s Muslim values, identity, and practices. These and related concerns could make it difficult for community members to form a deep, trustful relationship with Well Child staff. In turn, Well Child staff such as John may be reluctant to enable community-driven action out of concern that the villages would pursue practices that are harmful to the girls.

Personal Analysis and Reflection

Having done this kind of analysis and reflection with John, our hypothetical child protection worker, it is time now to repeat the process with yourself in mind. Please picture yourself in your role as a child protection worker—or, if you are not a child protection worker, imagine yourself as being one for the moment. Assume that your organization or agency has asked you to work in a country or area that is new to you and to help to address violence against children. Using the space below, write in a couple of points for each item, outlining your background/origin, beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, etc.

Write below:

Background/origin: _____

Beliefs: _____

Assumptions: _____

Knowledge: _____

Please take a couple of minutes to think how these might mesh or not mesh with beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. in the area you have envisioned. Please write down below a couple of key points. (Or, if you are in a group, this could be a topic for group discussion.)

Write below:

Now reflect for a moment on the likely power dynamics associated with your entry into the area. How are you positioned in regard to power relative to the local people? How are the local people positioned relative to you?

Write below:

Please reflect for a few minutes on how well or poorly what you bring to the community meshes with the views of local people. Jot down some key areas of possible overlap and also of possible disconnects.

Write below:

Perhaps most important, now take about 10 minutes to write out some key ideas about how what you bring to the community may affect (positively or negatively) efforts to build trust and a strong relationship with the community. Please write out some key reflections or discuss them with colleagues in a small group. Be sure to think about issues of power and imposition of outsider definitions, knowledge, values, and approaches.

Write below:

Last, take 10 minutes to reflect on and write down some of the things you could do to reduce the negative effects of what you bring to communities.

Write below:

Did you think of things such as the items below?

- Backgrounding your knowledge, values, and expectations: You cannot literally step out of your beliefs, values, assumptions, etc., but you can move them into the background of your mind and action. Rather than leading with your expertise, pretend that you are a student of a new people and place, about which you know very little. Be focused on the local people and learning from them, without judging them.
- Manage the power differential: Dress down and in ways that do not put you above local people. Avoid using technical language or introducing yourself in formal ways (e.g., by using your title). Can you think of other ways?
- Be aware of and reflect regularly on your nonverbal behavior. For example, do you wince or become too quiet when you observe a situation that is customary for local people but that you regard as discrimination against women?

- Use the language and terms of local people rather than using the technical vocabulary of outsiders.
- Work carefully with the translator in advance to help them aim for verbatim translation, without inserting their own words or views?
- Consider the possibility of sending someone else who can speak the local language, build trust quickly, and obtain accurate information?

The tools that follow outline additional strategies that can help you reduce the negative effects and also maximize the positive effects of what you bring to the community.