

Section 3: Note to Users

Although there are many different ways of learning about communities, this section features ethnographic methods since they enable learning about children's lived experiences, bring forward the views of local people, and build the deeper levels of trust and respect that are needed for community-led work on child protection.

The tools were developed and used in Sierra Leone (with some modifications) but can be adapted to many different contexts. The Sierra Leone emphasis is presented here in order to show a contextually specific adaptation of learning tools.

Although this section focuses specifically on the early phase of learning about (and with) the community, the tools from previous sections are relevant as well. It can be useful to think through how the people who will be collecting information in communities might benefit from first using several tools related to empathy (FAC 4), asking probing questions (FAC 6), and enabling inclusive dialogue (TRN 7), among others.

LNG 1. Learning Phase: Dos and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Approach community people with humility.	Judge local people as the “expert” on child protection.
View community people as actors who already do much to protect children (even if they don't describe it that way).	Regard people as beneficiaries, passive victims, or as having little ability to help themselves.
Following cultural scripts, meet with chiefs or senior leaders, explain your purpose in learning, and ask their approval for your learning activities.	Bypass leaders or fail to learn from them.
Dress appropriately and be with the people, without showing smart phones, etc.	Present oneself as wealthy and somehow “above” local people.
Speak the local language and use simple, local terminology, holding in the background your own terms and ideas.	Speak only in English or use only the language of international child protection, which positions you as the “expert.”
Engage in a slow, respectful process to learn more deeply than usual about communities.	Conduct a 2-day rapid assessment and assume one knows what the child protection issues are or how to address them.
Learn from different subgroups (e.g., girls, boys, women, men), including people who are marginalized.	Learn mainly from leaders or people who are in positions of power.
State your purpose as being one of “learning from the community.”	“Plant your flag” by focusing on your agency’s work and promise of intervention.
Learn through participatory methods that empower and give people a voice.	Ask mostly survey questions or structured interview questions that leave people feeling objectified.
Identify and learn about strengths or assets of the community and different subgroups.	Focus mainly on problems or deficits.

Consider having one or two staff members live with the affected people, doing participant observation and ongoing learning.	Visit only periodically and with a focus on “your” or “our” project that limits learning about the community and its people.
View the term “community” with a critical eye, recognizing there may be little sense of community.	Assume that local people who live as neighbors view themselves as a community.
Make learning about the community an ongoing process.	Take a one-off approach to learning, as communities and their situations are dynamic.
Feed what is learned back to the community, inviting them to reflect on what they could do.	Take an extractive approach of taking information from people without giving the information back.