

## Tips on running community meetings<sup>1</sup>

*These tips can be used to support staff when planning and holding meetings with communities.*

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

A community meeting brings together a cross-section of viewpoints, allows to exchange ideas and information, and grants community groups opportunities to influence plans by giving their feedback on what works and what needs to change.

Programme staff should hold community meetings at regular intervals, such as every two months, to create opportunities for dialogue and participation. These meetings should be cross sectoral, so that affected people only need to attend one meeting to influence the programme's holistic approach.

### **Planning a community meeting**

- Start by designating a planning committee that includes leaders and members of the community who can provide support in the planning process. Consider what role they can play and what role the agency or partners should fill.
- Agree to a location, time of day and duration. Pick a location that is easy to access, and accessible to everyone, but away from spectators or other interruptions. Plan the meeting at least a week before the meeting date. Keep in mind times when most people are available and plan for the meeting to last no more than 1.5 hours.
- Identify key topics to discuss during the meeting, and communicate this widely.
- Rely on community leaders and other influencers to share information on the meeting and mobilize people.
- Think on how to reach different groups in the community, especially women, youth, people with disabilities and marginalized groups, to ensure their participation.

### **Facilitating a community meeting**

- Begin by introducing the facilitator and note taker, thank everyone for participating, and present the topics that will be discussed.
- Get informed consent: ask permission from the group to take notes or record the meeting, explain that participants can leave the meeting at any time.
- Manage expectations: explain clearly that participation in the meeting does not guarantee people will receive any kind of support.
- Use open-ended questions to bring out the views of participants.
  - How?
  - What?
  - Why?
  - Can you tell us more about...?
  - Can you tell us what happened?
  - How did you feel when...?
  - Why do you think of...?

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from IFRC/ICRC (2017) *Community Engagement and Accountability toolkit*, Tool 11: Tips on community meetings and Catholic Relief Services (2013) *Communication Toolbox*

- Encourage all members of the group to participate and make sure that everyone that wants to contribute is given an opportunity to speak.
- Remain unbiased throughout the meeting and do not guide the discussion toward a certain outcome.
- Acknowledge complaints as well as unresolved anger and frustration from past events and move forward with a positive tone.
- At the end of the session, summarize what has been discussed and thank everyone for their participation. Explain that response, clarifications and follow-up actions will be communicated back to the community.
- Verify that the written record has captured the main points.

***After a meeting***

- Share the summary of the meeting with management and relevant colleagues, and discuss the key points raised.
- Triangulate the information with information collected through other ways (surveys, FGDs, etc.).
- Use the information to inform decision-making and adjust programming.
- Communicate response, clarifications and follow-up actions back to the community.