

# **Focus on Families and Culture:**

a guide for a participatory assessment  
on maternal and child health/nutrition →

Understanding family roles and influence to develop  
culturally-grounded MCHN interventions

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# Presentation objective

To present the Focus on *Families and Culture* tool for conducting a community assessment/  
formative research

# Presentation topics →

- Background to the *Focus on Families and Culture* (FFC) assessment methodology
- Five concepts related to the cultural context in collectivist societies that contributed to development of the FFC methodology
- Steps in the assessment methodology
- Examples of participatory data collection tools
- Conclusions

- Ibrahima's story

# Five underlying concepts

1. Two facets of culture
2. Family systems
3. Characteristics of collectivist cultures
4. Gender specific roles
5. Household Production of Health

# Two key facets of culture

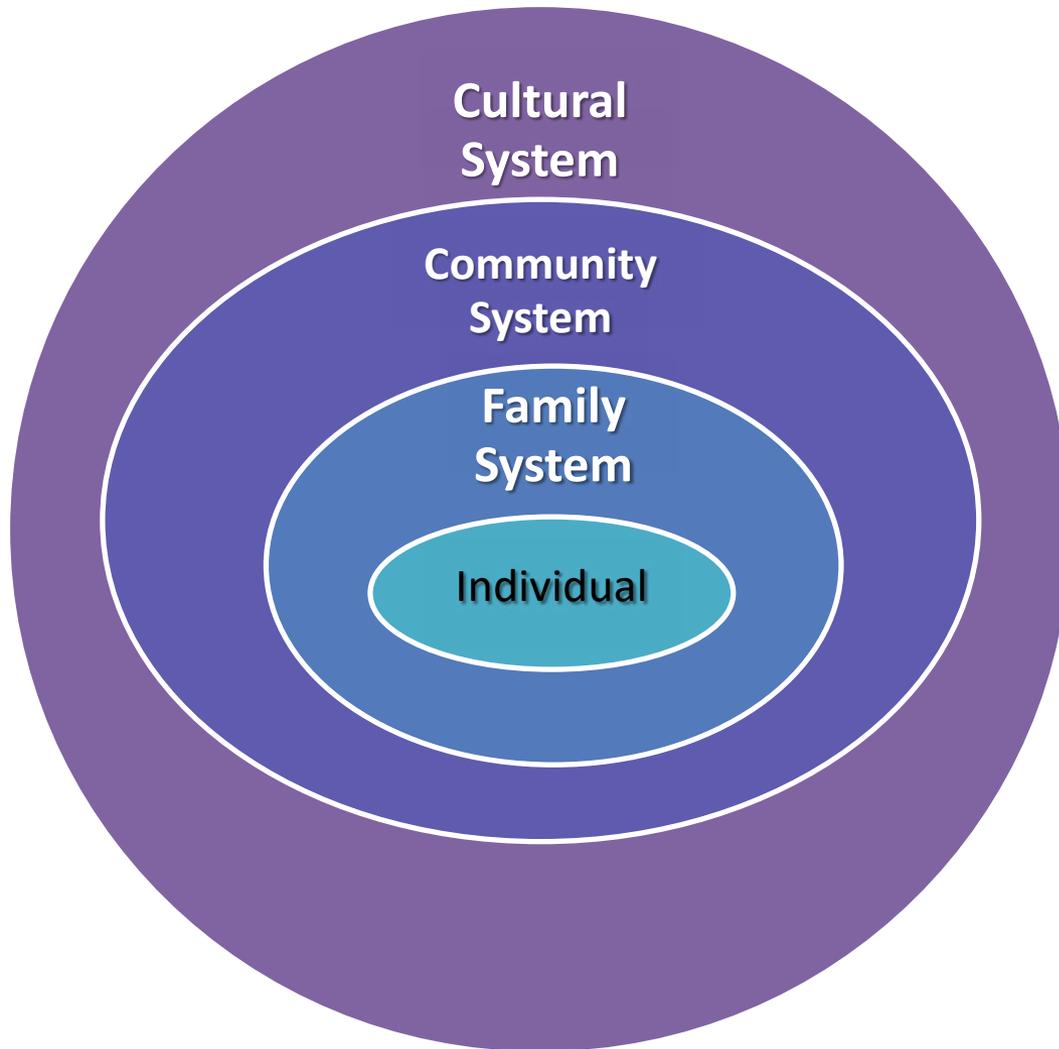
## ***Normative elements:***

- cultural norms, knowledge, attitudes, practices, behavior related to various issues

## ***Structural aspects of family & community systems:***

- roles, relationships, interaction, influence, hierarchy of authority, communication pathways, decision-making patterns

Pepitone, 1981



## Onion model

Helman, *Culture, Health and Illness*





# Collectivist & Individualist cultures

- A collectivist culture is one « in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often the extended family, which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. »

Hofstede, 1984



# Structure and dynamics of non-western collectivist cultures

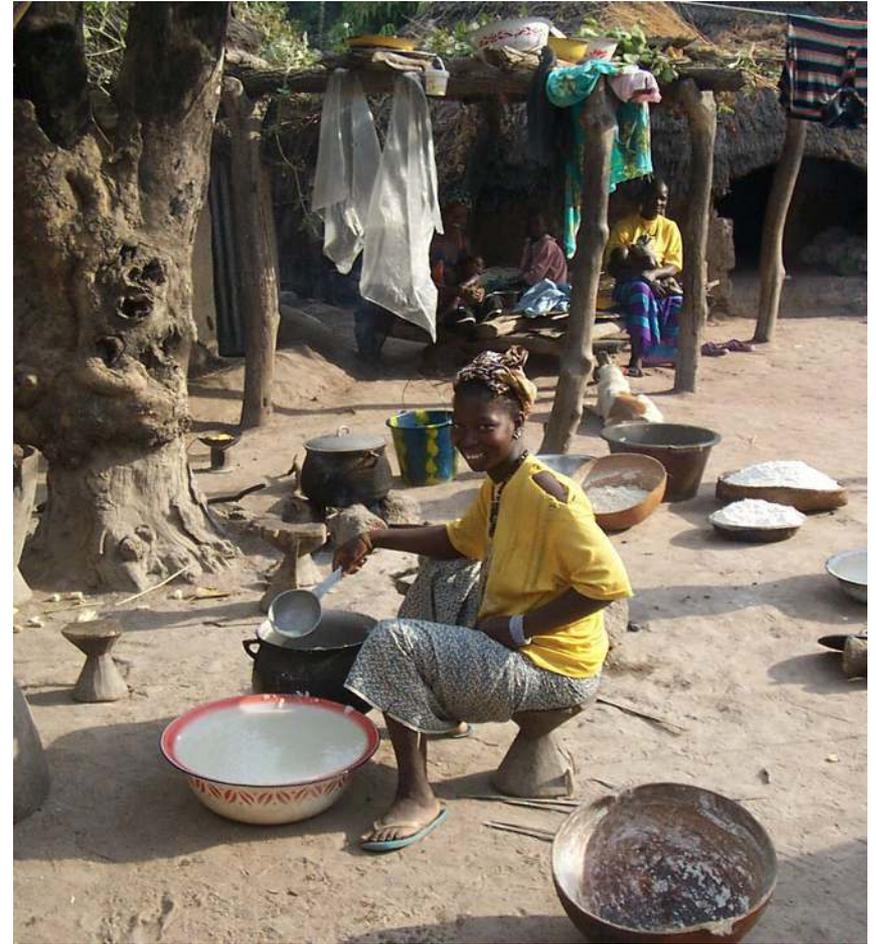
- Hierarchy of authority
- Respect for elders dominant value
- Role of elders is to define and enforce social norms
- Individual attitudes and behavior are strongly influenced by social norms
- Gender and age specific roles are dictated by culture
- Interconnectedness and interdependency are valued more than autonomy
- Social networks are structured by gender and age
- Intergenerational relations are valued
- Collective decision-making on issues related to well-being of family members





# Gender-specific roles

# Gender specific roles







*Edy*



# Role of elders



**“ In Africa when an elder dies it is  
as though a whole library had  
burned down.”**

Amadou Hampâté Ba  
Malian philosopher (1900-1991)



An elder woman sitting on the ground can see farther than a young person who is at the top of a tree.



# Household Production of Health

- 1) There are various categories of people within families, in addition to mother and father, who interact with/care for children.
- 2) Roles related to MCHN with the household are gender and age specific.
- 3) MCHN norms and practices adopted by family members are dictated by the cultural context, rather than by individual choice.

# Focus on Families & Culture Tool

- **Purpose** : To understand the values, roles, influence within family systems that influence MCHN norms and practices in order to develop culturally-grounded community programs
- **Use of this tool:**
  - 1) to develop SOW for formative research
  - 2) to conduct formative research in a specific cultural context/s

# Three components of the FFC conceptual framework for formative research



- Component 3: Cultural norms, knowledge attitudes and practices
- Component 2: Family and community roles and influence
- Component 1: Family structure, values, traditions and dynamics

# Component 1: Family structure, values, traditions and dynamics

- Family structure: extended or nuclear?
- Religious values/traditions related to MCHN?
- Hierarchy of authority within families?
- Gender specificity in roles and expertise?
- Children belong only to the biological parents or the extended family?
- Transmission of social norms/practices from generation to generation?



Family A



Family B

# Component 2: Family and community roles and influence

- Roles of different family members in different MCHN activities (mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, older daughters, aunties, neighbors)
- Decision-making patterns on MCHN issues?
- Role of biological parents and extended family members in care-giving for MCHN?
- Role of neighbors & informal « advisors » on MCHN issues?

# Component 3: Cultural norms, knowledge attitudes and practices

- Knowledge, attitudes and practices related to aspects of MCHN (for example, maternal diet during pregnancy, breastfeeding, complementary feeding, etc.)
- Cultural norms related to the care of pregnant women, newborns, young children

# Three components of the FFC conceptual framework for formative research



- Component 3: Cultural norms, knowledge attitudes and practices
- Component 2: Family and community roles and influence
- Component 1: Family structure, values, traditions and dynamics

# FFC steps for planning and conducting formative research

- Step 1: Define topic and goal of the maternal and child nutrition study
- Step 2: Identify assessment and logistics coordinators for the study
- Step 3: Review existing studies on the maternal and child nutrition topic
- Step 4: Discuss the GMP conceptual framework on families and culture
- Step 5: Carry out social influence analysis

- Step 6: Define the objectives of the study
- Step 7: Define the sample of people to be interviewed
- Step 8: Develop data collection strategy including activities and tools
- Step 9: Identify assessment team members
- Step 10: Train assessment team members

# Data collection tools/activities (pg. 28)

- Individual interviews
- Group interviews
- Group discussions
- Observations





- Step 11: Develop calendar and logistical plan for site visits
- Step 12: Carry out community interviews and initial data analysis
- Step 13: Summarize findings and write assessment report
- Step 14: Present assessment findings and formulate recommendations
- Step 15: Disseminate the report to organizational staff and communities

# Data collection activity: identifying roles of key family members (p. 30-31)

- Group interview
- Using simple drawings of key family members
- Technique: Hold up pictures of family members one by one and ask → What is the role of this family member in everyday life?



Results of this exercise from Sierra  
Leone: pg 31-32

# Conclusions

- In development of community programs, a key step is the identification of family and community actors who influence, directly or indirectly, the issue to be addressed.
- The *Focus on Family and Culture* tool has been used in various cultural contexts and been effective:
  - In involving community members in the process of identifying those family and community members
- Effective use of the FFC tool requires: good planning for data collection; adequate preparation/training of interviewers/facilitators; and interviewers with good listening and facilitation skills.