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

Judi Aubel
Executive Director
Grandmother Project – Change through Culture
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
Cultural System
Community System
Family System
Individual

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
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?
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.