



# **IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY LEARNING AND GROUP COUNSELING**

Figure 8: Implementing Group Learning and Counseling



## FACILITATORS

- COMMUNITY LEARNING**
  - Mobilize community members to participate in sessions on fertility awareness and family planning topics
  - Facilitate *Community Learning* sessions
  - Refer interested participants for other hormonal, long-term and permanent family planning methods in their area by distributing invitation cards
- GROUP COUNSELING**
  - Mobilize *Community Learning* participants to attend *Group Counseling* on Standard Days Method and TwoDay Method
  - Facilitate Couple *Group Counseling* to interested couples and women
  - Facilitate FAM Users Support sessions



## MENTORS/SUPERVISORS

- Lead the community mobilization process, including the planning, execution, and evaluation of mobilization activities
- Provide training and ongoing support and mentorship to Facilitators



## STAKEHOLDERS

- Raise awareness and promote acceptance of fertility awareness and FAM activities in the community
- Mobilize community members to participate in *Community Learning* and *Group Counseling* sessions
- Participate in regular reflection meetings with their peers and other Project Staff



## PROGRAM STAFF

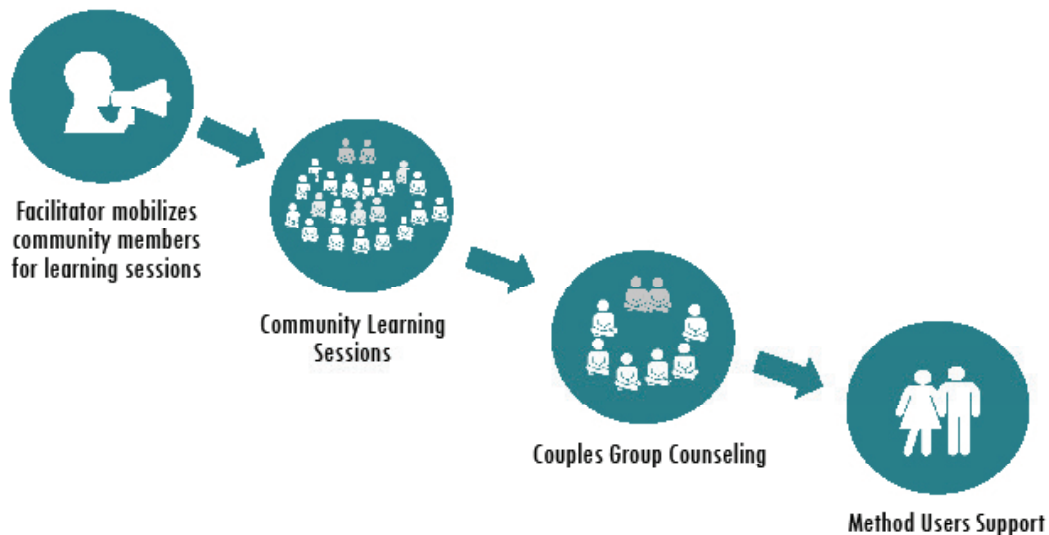
- Supervise Facilitators and routinely assess program monitoring forms to facilitate quality monitoring
- Facilitate sensitization activities at community meetings
- Conduct reflection meetings with Stakeholders

# 8

# Implementing

## Community Learning and Group Counseling

In the Implementation section of the Group Learning and Counseling model, facilitators should have the capacity to work with mentors/supervisor, local stakeholders and program staff to mobilize community members around Community Learning and to deliver Community Learning and Group Counseling sessions (Figure 8).



### HOW TO IMPLEMENT COMMUNITY LEARNING

The elements of Community Learning may be thought of as a series of facilitator-initiated steps. These steps, which are also included in the Roadmap at the beginning of this handbook, are specified in greater detail in this chapter. We recommend that program managers read through the items provided below, and discover how facilitators implemented these steps in the “WALAN Story”.

#### Schedule Community Learning Sessions

The first step in preparing to implement Community Learning sessions is a practical one. Facilitator, in their assigned pairs, should consult their personal diaries and prepare a shared calendar of sessions. Community Learning sessions should be scheduled a minimum of two times per month over a three-month period to be able to cover all topics. Later, facilitators can schedule additional sessions so that all community members are able to attend.

## **Invite (mobilize) community members to attend sessions**

Facilitators, with the support of local stakeholders, CDOs, and program staff are tasked with mobilizing their communities to attend Community Learning sessions. Facilitators may choose to invite community members in many different ways, including:

- Announcing sessions at water well
- Posting a note in a public area
- Telling friends and family
- Asking community members to assist by “spreading the word”
- Phone calls
- Asking a religious leader to announce sessions at the pulpit or during congregation meetings

## **Deliver Community Learning Sessions**

Once facilitators have invited community members to attend and have prepared all relevant materials, the pair of facilitators deliver Community Learning sessions on three separate topics, one topic per session. These topics (Female and Male Fertility, HTSP and Family planning and LAM) are included in the Facilitators Guide, and facilitators will have received comprehensive training in each of these topics.

## **Complete Recording Forms**

At each Community Learning session, facilitators should complete an Attendance Form to record information on the session and the attending participants. This form and detailed instructions for completing it are provided in Section 9. Facilitators turn in these forms to the mentor/supervisor during their monthly visits.

## **Meet with mentor/supervisors**

Early in the implementation process, facilitators meet monthly with their mentor/ supervisors in a multi-purpose meeting. Mentor/supervisors schedule this visit in advance to coincide with a Community Learning session, in order to observe facilitators deliver it and provide them with feedback on their performance. This meeting also is an opportunity for facilitators to provide updates, discuss challenges and ask for further clarification on content, and turn in records. Additional details regarding supervisory visits are provided in the Section 9 Monitoring.

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT GROUP COUNSELING

Similar to Community Learning, facilitators also follow a series of steps to carry out FAM Group Counseling also follow a series of facilitator-initiated steps. These steps, which are also included in the Roadmap at the beginning of this handbook, are specified in greater detail below. Program managers can read through the items provided below, followed by a description of how facilitators conducted Group Counseling sessions in the “WALAN Story”.

### Schedule and prepare Group Counseling sessions in FAM for interested couples

Upon completing a round of Community Learning sessions on the three topics, facilitators will have identified those group members that are interested in learning about a specific FAM. In preparing for Group Counseling, facilitators should follow the guidance in the lesson plans for SDM and TwoDay Method included in the Facilitators’ Guide. The facilitators should then schedule and communicate to interested couples the dates for the different FAM Group Counseling sessions. Most likely, the Group Counseling session will occur in the same location where the Community Learning session took place. Facilitators should prepare well and in advance and have ready the FAM materials (e.g., CycleBeads, TwoDay brochure and marking calendar) for these sessions depending on what method of interest.

### Conduct Group Counseling sessions in FAM for interested couples

Facilitators should deliver the sessions with group members at the agreed upon time and location. Group Counseling sessions comprise groups of minimum 2 and maximum 6 couples. Women and couples are screened to determine if they are eligible to begin using the FAM they selected. If they are eligible, detailed information on the method is provided.

### Complete recording forms

At the beginning of the Group Counseling session with couples, facilitators should complete the Method User Registry form, especially to apply the screening that determines if the couple/ woman meet the method requirements. Facilitators also complete the Monthly Supply Form to keep track of method supplies. These forms form and detailed instructions for completing it are provided in Section 9. Facilitators turn in these forms to the mentor/supervisor during their monthly visits.

### Meet with mentor/supervisors

As per Community Learning, facilitators meet monthly with their mentor/ supervisors in a multi-purpose meeting. This meeting also is an opportunity for facilitators to provide updates, discuss challenges and ask for further clarification on content, and turn in records. Additional details regarding supervisory visits are provided in the Section 9 Monitoring.

## **HOW TO REFER COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOR FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES**

During Community Learning sessions, facilitators will ask group members if they are interested in a family planning method. Those who are interested in SDM or TwoDay are invited to attend a couples Group Counseling session. To those who are interested in other methods (oral contraceptives, injection, implant, IUD, female condoms, or male condoms) the facilitator should provide them with a family planning invitation card and refer them to a health facility or VHT.

## **HOW TO IMPLEMENT METHOD SUPPORT SESSIONS WITH FAM USERS**

To support FAM users who have opted for either SDM or TwoDay Method, facilitators should schedule a follow-up session by type of method. This session is an opportunity for couples and women using a FAM to share how they are using their method, discuss challenges and learn from their peers of ways of handling these, especially management of fertile days. During this support session facilitators also reinforce key messages on the method and support those couples that wish to transition to another method.

### **Schedule, prepare and provide Group Counseling sessions in FAM to interested couples**

The facilitators should schedule the first method support sessions a month after the initial Group Counseling Session. Preparations for the support session is similar to the Group Counseling and a lesson plan is provided in the Facilitators Guide.

### **Complete recording forms**

A form for the method support session should be completed as users arrive to the session. This form and instructions for completing it are found in Section 9 Monitoring.

## HOW TO ENSURE QUALITY SESSIONS THROUGH SUPERVISION

In the Group Learning and Counseling model, Facilitators participate in monthly meetings with supervisors. Supervisors provide the facilitators with supervision and mentorship, and monthly meetings are an opportunity for facilitators to discuss their experiences implementing the sessions. Specifically, facilitators may describe challenges they've faced or ask for further clarification on content. Additionally, these meetings provide an opportunity for supervisors to:

- Monitor facilitator timetables
- Observe facilitators in their sessions
- Provide mentoring and help facilitators problem-solve
- Collect monitoring forms and check on the quality of facilitators recording
- Check stock and restock facilitator supplies

### How and when can supervisors provide support?

Supervisors provide support by completing monthly meetings with facilitators. Meetings should be guided by the items included on the Facilitators Mentoring and Support Checklist. During this conversation, supervisors should ensure they offer constructive feedback in their responses.

### Facilitator Tools

Facilitators are trained to use a set of simple job aids and low-literacy materials on SDM and TwoDay Method to deliver Community Learning sessions and couples counseling:

- **Facilitators Guide**
- **Flipchart**
- **Activity Cards**
- **Family Planning Methods Board**
- **Family Planning Poster and invitation Card**

### Facilitators Forms

Forms allow facilitators to document their progress, and provide information that will help supervisors troubleshoot any challenges that arise during sessions. Forms also relay information back to program staff, allowing them to monitor the number and type of participants that are exposed to FA and FAM.

- **Form A – Community Learning Attendance**
- **Form B – Group Counseling Method User Registry**
- **Form C – Method Support User Registry**
- **Form D – Facilitator Monthly Supply Form**

## Recommendations and tips

- Facilitators should review “How to be a good facilitator” to refresh basic skills that have been identified as gaps during observations
- Facilitators should be reminded to check off the learning session topic at the beginning of each form (e.g., Human Fertility, HTSP, LAM, Family Planning)
- Steps outlined in the lesson plan for using the couple communication activity cards should be reviewed prior to the Group Counseling sessions
- If group members arrive late for Group Counseling sessions, facilitators must ask those who arrived late to stay and cover screening to know if: (1) they meet the method conditions; and (2) explain method use in detail if the participant who is late wants to start using the method.
- Monitor to ensure that before starting the counseling, facilitators must fill the attendance sheet. When filing it, they must remember to ask if any woman present is pregnant. Neither women who are pregnant nor using a method currently should stay in the session.
- During the Group Counseling sessions, facilitators should explain only one method (either SDM or TwoDay method). These are two different methods with their own separate information. SDM users know they are fertile on white bead days. TwoDay users know they are fertile on days with secretions (today or yesterday). These methods, explained together, may confuse users about when they are fertile.





## THE WALAN STORY

In WALAN, Community Learning sessions and Group Counseling sessions were conducted through facilitators recruited from YIELD groups. Selected by their own peers, facilitators were YIELD group members between the ages of 18 and 30. Findings were collected during the Proof of Concept phase and well as the WALAN pilot.

Facilitators experienced some difficulties recruiting community members for Community Learning sessions during WALAN, and generally were most successful in mobilizing their communities when they worked closely with both local stakeholders CDOs. For example, CDOs were able to provide phone access so that facilitators could call community members and invite them to sessions. CDOs were also able to communicate with local stakeholders, who in turn mobilized community members to attend. During reflection meetings, some local stakeholders expressed their desire to become more involved in the mobilization process. Facilitators also employed other techniques to try and mobilize community members. For example, they would compose invitation messages containing the date, time and location of Community Learning sessions. These notices would then be pinned to message boards in community spaces. They would also work with stakeholders to recruit community members at local gatherings or events.

WALAN facilitators found their experience conducting Community Learning sessions to be informative for their own learning, not just community members. Facilitators, prior to training, had little knowledge of FAM. After delivering the sessions, some facilitators chose to use FAM in their relationships. This understanding enhanced the collective learning approach that informs the Community Learning sessions. Additionally, the facilitators were largely passionate about the topics they were discussing, which attracted community members to their sessions. In general, acting as a facilitator also created a network within the facilitators. Some reported that it increased their standing in the community, encouraging both respect from community members. Facilitators were also able to incorporate the input of local community and religious leaders into their sessions. Sometimes, leaders would attend sessions, reinforcing their support for WALAN.

During the WALAN Proof of Concept phase, SDM and TwoDay Method group counseling participants were satisfied and comfortable learning about FAM in small groups with other couples. Observation data revealed that facilitator pairs correctly explained the use of SDM and TwoDay Method during group counseling sessions, effectively utilized job aides and fostered a safe learning environment for participants (e.g. putting participants at ease, showing mutual respect, and ensuring privacy). Community leaders and providers reported that the small group counseling model outside of the health system was an acceptable approach. They additionally mentioned that this setting may not be appropriate for couples and women who need to disclose very sensitive information. They recommended that facilitators should be trained to find opportunities to counsel couples and women's individual needs when the situation arises. Subsequently, this training was included in the model. Finally, the proof of concept phase tested the provision of group counseling sessions to couples, while some stakeholders expressed the importance of providing group counseling sessions to groups of women as well. The model was then modified to include women-only sessions, so that women were able to learn a FAM even if their partner wasn't present.

## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Throughout the WALAN intervention that piloted the Group Learning and Counseling Model, program staff were careful to monitor challenges that arose during the implementation. Program managers should be careful to consider these challenges as they begin to adapt the Group Learning and Counseling model for their own organization or program. For each challenge, guidance around a solution is provided. However, program managers should be aware that additional challenges may arise, and that the solutions provided here may need to be modified to accommodate their specific needs.

Challenges in Community Learning	
Community members may arrive late to Community Learning sessions, resulting in a delayed start time.	To compensate for potential lateness, facilitators should begin sessions at the scheduled time. If group members arrive a few minutes late, they should join the session. If they are extremely late, facilitators can invite them stay but to return during the next scheduled session.
Community members may expect refreshments during sessions.	Reinforce the importance of attending the sessions and the knowledge that will be gained through participation. Indicate that attendance is volunteer and based on participants' interest in the topics.
Community Learning and Group Counseling	
Group participants should be properly screened for method eligibility.	Implement steps to ensure that supervisors support their assigned Facilitators review the criteria for each method; reinforce supportive supervision on proper client screening.
TwoDay Method can be considered culturally inappropriate and unhygienic in some communities.	Reinforce TwoDay Method instructions to emphasize that vaginal secretions are not associated with a woman being dirty. Also reinforce the use of paper to wipe or looking in underwear, rather than using hands to check for secretions.
TwoDay Method users are satisfied with their method, but do not feel supported by some of their peers.	Expand TwoDay Method explanations during community sensitizations and orientations with health service provider and community leaders to address cultural and hygiene concerns.
Women express desire to attend counseling sessions but are not comfortable disclosing session attendance to their partners.	Provide women-only group counseling sessions as alternative sessions for women who attend a group counseling session without their partner. Reinforce that method support sessions can either be attended by couples or women-only.