

# Community conversation: an approach for collaborative learning and action in animal health management

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# Background and context

Animal health management is a primary issue for smallholder livestock keepers. To design and implement gender-responsive animal health interventions, ILRI and its research and development partners conducted participatory epidemiology and gender analysis to better understand and prioritize livestock disease constraints, how these affect different households, and men and women's knowledge about disease transmission and control measures (Wieland et al. 2016). Findings from this study showed knowledge gaps among community members about animal disease transmission and gender issues in livestock management.

As part of the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock (Livestock CRP) work in Ethiopia, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) research teams, in collaboration with research and development partners, tested a gender transformative community-based collaborative learning and action approach known as 'community conversation' to engage community members and local partners in dialogues and joint actions about gender and livestock health management issues.

Community conversation is a community-based engagement approach through which community members work with trained facilitators to collectively identify community strengths and constraints, analyse community values and practices, and explore strategies for addressing challenges (Lemma et al. 2018; 2019a; 2020a).

This practice brief is informed by community conversation interventions in five Livestock CRP sites from 2018 to 2021. It is intended to be a reflective and synthesis tool that draws experiences and lessons from action-oriented community conversation interventions aiming at sharing lessons for development organizations intending to apply community conversations.

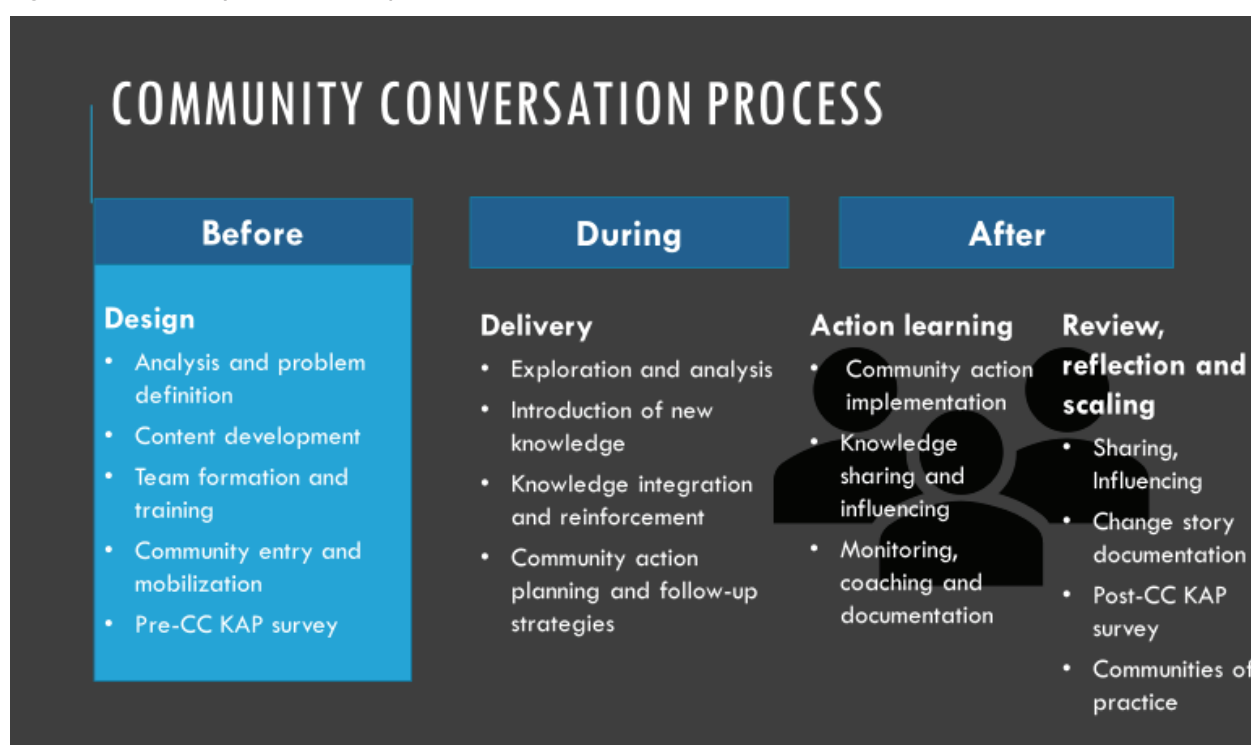
# Why community conversations in animal health management

- Changing the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) of community members is often complex and challenging.
- Information provided in conventional formats does little to influence perspectives, knowledge and practices of community members.
- Conventional community meetings and training activities, which aim to inform and transmit information, allow little space for collaborative learning and action.
- Addressing underlying sociocultural values and norms that shape the behaviours and attitudes of community members and the patterns of interactions between men and women requires engaging community members in participatory learning processes to explore and analyse issues and generate solutions together along with service providers.
- Successful animal health management requires community awareness and action. Community conversations facilitate changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices of community members by creating inclusive space for dialogue, joint analysis, collaborative learning and action.

# Overview of the community conversation process

The community conversation process has four iterative phases (design, delivery, action and scaling) happening in distinct time periods (before, during and after community conversation events). Each phase involves a set of activities aligning to a period (Figure 1). For example, during a community conversation, the delivery phase involves four learning activities: 1) exploration and analysis of existing knowledge, attitudes and practices; 2) introduction of new knowledge to address knowledge gaps and/or supplement existing knowledge; 3) learning integration and reinforcement through communicating key action messages; and 4) community action planning and follow-up strategies. Community facilitators use different active learning methods to facilitate learning in these learning activities (Table 1).

Figure 1. Community conversation process



Source: authors' analysis

Starting from and engaging community members to explore and question their own knowledge, attitudes and practices about animal health management issues allows community members to be aware of (recognize or appreciate) the problem and make them think about it (contemplate, see the need for analysis and seek solutions). The expected outcome of this learning activity is awareness creation and sensitization of community members about the issues in question and creation of need and motivation to learn and engage in discussions about animal health management topics.

Once community members recognize and identify their knowledge, attitude and practice gaps and are motivated to learn, then new knowledge is introduced and reinforced. This learning activity is key to develop the knowledge and skills of community members. The expected outcome of this learning activity is that community members express interest/intention for action and are motivated and confident to prevent and control animal disease transmission.

The third learning activity is learning integration and reinforcement. In this learning activity, community facilitators summarize the main learning points, check for understanding and reinforce learning by communicating key action messages. The expected outcome of this learning activity is motivation, confidence, and preparation of community members to take or experiment with small actions to improve the health, welfare and productivity of their animals.

The final learning activity is community action planning and follow-up strategies. In this learning activity, community facilitators encourage community members to identify and commit to community actions to prevent and control animal disease transmission by articulating the benefits of the actions and telling/sharing motivational action-benefit stories. In addition, local partners agree on follow-up strategies and express commitment for supporting and monitoring implementation of the community actions. The expected outcome of this learning activity is community action plans, motivation/commitment of community members to apply the learning and responsible follow-up strategies by local service providers.

Table 1. Overview of community conversation process

Activity	Objectives	Methods/tools	Outputs
Assessment, analysis, and issue identification	Define and analyse problem situation	Focus group discussions	Problem situation defined and analysed
	Identify discussion issues and content	Key informant interviews	Key KAP community gaps identified
		Transect walks	
Facilitation team alignment on methodology, facilitation principles and process, discussion issues and role sharing	Develop content to address KAP gaps of community members	Team learning and reflection questions	Clear understanding of the methodology and outcomes created by the facilitating organization and partner staff
	Team learning and sharing on the methodology, delivery and documentation process		
Community entry and mobilization	Get the buy-in and support of community leaders and local service providers	Representation and participation criteria	Representation and participation of men and women community members and relevant partners ensured
	Achieve community representation and inclusiveness based on agreed criteria	Review and approval of participation list	
Pre-community conversation KAP survey	Establish KAP baseline	Individual interviews using semi-structured questionnaires	KAP baseline of community members created
	Familiarize with thinking and reasoning frame of community members		Facilitation team get familiarized with community perspectives and better articulates discussion issues
Opening: welcome, team introduction and elders' blessings	Create warm learning environment	Use of context-setting posters	An informal, inviting and non-threatening discussion environment created
	Build rapport, trust and intimacy	Informal storytelling	
		Use of opinion leaders	
Setting context and clarifying expectations	Create motivation and need for learning and participation	Storytelling	Motivation, creating the need for engagement and learning
	Intention for knowledge application	Role definition	Creating informal environment for active discussion
		Goal setting	



Activity	Objectives	Methods/tools	Outputs
Exploration	<p>Build on existing knowledge and make the learning relevant, meaningful and problem-based</p> <p>Identify KAP gaps</p> <p>Stimulate thinking and motivation for experiential learning, meaningful engagement, sense-making</p>	<p>Challenge: in the form of a question, a thought-provoking story or picture, an example, brainstorming, role playing, panel discussion</p> <p>Discussion: allow community members to respond and discuss using interactive discussion strategies</p> <p>Focus and narrow: move the group to focus on the topic</p> <p>Exemplify: clarify with examples, added information, storytelling</p> <p>Synthesize: summarize and highlight most relevant responses; clarify important points</p>	<p>Key KAP gaps identified</p> <p>Motivation for learning and change created</p>
Introducing new knowledge	<p>Address KAP gaps or supplement existing knowledge and practices</p>	<p>Pictorial presentation</p> <p>Interactive discussion</p> <p>Demonstration</p> <p>Checking understanding and sense-making</p>	<p>New perspectives created and knowledge improved</p>
Learning integration and reinforcement	<p>Communicate key messages and reinforce learning</p>	<p>Recapping, summary presentation, reflections</p> <p>Check for understanding and reinforce key messages</p>	<p>Key messages communicated and learning reinforced</p> <p>Motivation for action created</p>
Community action planning	<p>Identify intention to apply new knowledge</p> <p>Identify change/monitoring indicators</p>	<p>Community action plan template</p>	<p>Community actions agreed</p> <p>Motivation and commitment for action created</p>
Reflections and follow-up strategies	<p>Reflections on experiences, observations and insights</p> <p>Action and learning groups</p> <p>Partner commitment, follow-up and monitoring strategies</p>	<p>Reflection questions</p> <p>Follow-up strategies</p>	<p>Institutional ownership and commitment for supporting community actions created</p>
Closing: elders' blessings/ community prayers	<p>Smooth session ending</p>	<p>Blessings and messages by elders</p>	<p>Smooth and culturally appropriate ending of discussion</p>
After-event team reflections and learning	<p>On-the-spot analysis and capturing of emerging themes, lessons and observations</p> <p>Generative and experiential team learning and re-planning</p>	<p>Reflection questions: What went well? What did not go well? What is new and surprising? What key lessons emerged? What came out of the discussion? Any unique observations? Key KAP gaps? Key learning points and actions? How to use the approach?</p>	<p>Reflective and generative team analysis, learning and sharing; capturing emerging themes, new insights and lessons</p>

Activity	Objectives	Methods/tools	Outputs
Community action plan implementation	Knowledge application, action learning	Coaching support	Influencing through social learning
	Follow-up, monitoring and coaching	Creating spaces for information sharing	Practice change
	Wider community influencing through information sharing and demonstration effects of participating community members	Peer learning among community members	
Review, sharing, documentation and scaling	Reflect and capture experiences and changes	Panel discussions	Motivation and influencing
	Outcome story documentation	Change storytelling	Documentation of outcome case stories
	Promotion, influencing and scaling	Field days, demonstrations	
	Celebration and closing of community conversation interventions		
Post-community conversation KAP survey	Measure KAP changes	Individual interviews using semi-structured questionnaires	KAP changes measured and compared

# Behaviour change through community conversations

As an inclusive, participatory learning approach, community conversations are action-oriented behaviour change modification methods (Figure 2). The 'during' and 'after' phases of the community conversation process (see Figure 1) align with the stages of behaviour change in iterative learning activities.

Figure 2. Behaviour change modification through community conversations

Behaviour change stage	Characteristics	Learning activities
Unaware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Denial, ignorance of problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploration, analysis and critical reflection</li> <li>Re-thinking, questioning perceptions</li> </ul>
Aware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed feelings, contradictions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and analyse barriers and benefits, introduce new knowledge</li> </ul>
Motivated to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conviction, change desire, preparation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action messages, information on correct use, knowledge reinforcement, action plan, follow-up strategies</li> </ul>
Practicing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action plan implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaching, problem-solving support, encouragement</li> </ul>
Influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrate success, influence others, advocate change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion, knowledge sharing, demonstration, change storytelling, scaling</li> </ul>

Source: authors' analysis

## Unaware

Initially, community members exhibit ignorance of a problem situation. They portray an ideal picture and deny the existence of the problem. For example, they may claim that both men and women equally share domestic roles, or that either men or women give better care for their animals. This demonstrates the unawareness stage of behaviour change. In this stage, community conversation learning activities involve deeper and critical dialogues among community members to explore and critically examine or question existing perceptions and practices using active learning methods. This critical analysis, re-thinking and self-reflection then leads to new perspectives or insights into the problem situation.

## Aware

The awareness stage of behaviour change is a turning point, where community members acknowledge/recognize the problem situation and become open to explore and analyse the benefits and barriers to change. At this stage, community conversation learning activities involve analysis of key knowledge, attitude and practice gaps and introduce new knowledge to address these gaps or supplement exiting knowledge and practices. At this stage, community members may be ambivalent or may have conflicted emotions or feelings as the new information challenges their existing perceptions. It is important to assist community members to have confidence and confirm readiness and ability to change by examining the pros and cons of behaviour change at this stage. For example, in one site, a male community member initially resisted to take on domestic roles, arguing that it is culturally a woman's domain, but later, through questioning of this perception, he acknowledges that he was wrong and now intends to change his behaviour. For this person to affirm and have confidence to change, it is important to provide convincing or persuasive information by sharing facts, testimonies and clarifying the benefits of change.

## Motivated to change

This is the readiness and preparation stage of behaviour change. At this stage, community conversation learning activities involve checking for understanding, clarifying doubts, knowledge reinforcement through communicating action messages, identifying community actions, and encouragement for actions by demonstrating benefits of particular actions.

## Practicing change

This is the action or practicing stage of behaviour change, which aligns with the action learning phase of the community conversation process. The learning activities involved in this phase include implementation of community actions, monitoring and problem-solving support.

## Influencing

The final stage of behaviour change involves reward, celebration and retention of change, which aligns with the review, reflection and scaling phase of the community conversation process. In this phase, the learning activities include influencing and scaling through wider sharing of change stories and demonstration of new behaviours. Sustainability of new behaviour or change is assured through establishment of communities of practice, capacity development of service providers and integration of the community conversation approach into the extension system.

# Benefits and outcomes of community conversations

Community conversations have multiple applications in different contexts (Figure 3) depending on the intended purpose and outcomes.

- Community conversations make learning stimulative, engaging and empowering for community members and local partners.
- Community conversations transform intra-household gender relations and empower women in male-headed households.
- Community conversations strengthen facilitation, learning and partnering capacity of local research and development partners.
- Working with and through partners helps localize and co-develop learning materials appropriate to local contexts and communicate messages that suit local thinking and perspectives.
- Community conversations facilitate collaborative analysis, learning and joint action among community members and local service providers.
- Engaging community members and service providers in mutual learning and co-creation of knowledge promotes understanding of one another's perspectives by reducing social distance.
- As a gender-transformative approach, community conversations help partners achieve both gender equality and sectoral development outcomes.

Figure 3. Multiple applications of community conversations

## MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Research method	Training method	Planning method	Intervention method	Partnership method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory action research</li> <li>• Testing and developing technologies with farmer groups</li> <li>• Problem-solving research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory, experiential, problem-based learning</li> <li>• Accessible and action-oriented</li> <li>• Collaborative learning and action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint analysis and planning</li> <li>• Community ownership, inclusiveness</li> <li>• Community-driven actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community ownership</li> <li>• Collaborative learning and action</li> <li>• Responsible and accountable actions</li> <li>• Joint monitoring and evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand capacity, informed and empowered community</li> <li>• Response capacity, engaging and inclusive service providers</li> </ul>

- Community conversations increase intimacy and interactions among community members and service providers by developing rapport and reducing social distance.
- Couples (husband and wife) participation in community conversations improves intra-household interactions, sharing of information, collective household decision-making and action and family harmony. It increases access to knowledge and information by women in male-headed households and enhances their ability to share knowledge and information within the household and beyond. For example, a number of men community members reported that they were taking on domestic tasks, thereby enabling the participation of their wives in community meetings.
- Community conversations are powerful tools to engage community members in collaborative learning, reflection and problem solving, and facilitate outreach to the wider community through social learning and peer influence.
- Community conversations are an effective way to feedback community voices into local planning and intervention processes.

# Taking community conversations to scale

Community conversations facilitate integrated livestock management interventions at the delivery level by fostering joint analysis, action and learning among community members and local partners. The influence of community conversations is leveraged through informal and planned dissemination interventions in an iterative way (Figure 4). Information from community conversation events is shared widely through networks of community members and demonstration effects. Community members use informal spaces and networks (such as home visits, social gatherings and local savings groups) to share information from their conversations with household members, neighbours and other community members. These information sharing networks are regarded as webs of conversations that connect ideas and people, forming a larger framework of meaning and ideas, which further inform the cultural and social structure of the networks (Kotzé et al. 2013).

Community influencing is supported by integrated actions of core implementing partners. Community voices and actions from community conversations feed into and are taken up by frontline delivery partners through coaching and monitoring support for community members in the implementation of their action plans. Through the coordination of a lead partner (e.g. livestock development office), core delivery partners work as a community of practice to act and learn together in supporting implementation and scaling of community conversation interventions.

Figure 4. Community conversation scaling strategies

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS OUTREACH STRATEGIES



Source: authors' analysis

However, addressing some of the issues raised during community conversations can be beyond the capacity of community members and frontline partners, requiring other forms of interventions, such as multi-stakeholder platforms, to address strategic or institutional issues. Informal community dissemination and institutional scaling through community of practice and multi-stakeholder platforms are complementary outreach strategies that increase the influence of community conversations.

# Lessons learned and considerations for scaling

- Community conversations typically evolve from a confirmatory view of community members (portraying ideal picture, denial of a problem situation) to a more critical view of perceptions and practices (awareness, recognition of the problem) to community visioning (motivation to change) and actions (practicing change).
- Community members find the community conversation process different from their usual experience of listening to outsiders.
- Working in partnership with research and development partners is key to the successful design and implementation of community conversations. Working with and through research and development partners helps contextualize the process and discussion issues, strengthen capacity of local partners and increase uptake of the methodology.
- Community conversations provide practical learning experience for local service providers to develop their interaction, engagement and communication skills.
- A deeper level of learning lies in personal reflection and the insight-making process. An after-event reflection and insight-making process encourages on-the-spot analysis, interpretation and validation of community conversation results.
- Community conversation is not a stand-alone intervention. It needs to be an integral component of ongoing interventions.
- Experience sharing with other community members is essential to foster scaling of community conversations. Development agents can facilitate sharing of information through farmer development groups and functional adult learning programs.
- Religious leaders, community leaders and local group leaders can also play key roles in sharing information from community conversations, reinforcing messages and sustaining attitudinal and behavioural changes.
- Community conversations require a good level of facilitation, reflective writing and process documentation skills.
- Rich process documentation and quality facilitation are key to a successful implementation of community conversations. On-the-spot reflection, review and summary of each community conversation session is necessary to document the learning process and outputs.
- As action-oriented interventions, community conversations require follow-up and monitoring support by local partners. Communities of practice and strategic multi-stakeholder platforms form institutional mechanisms to support community actions.



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