

DIALOGUE FACILITATION GUIDE



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This dialogue facilitation guide is designed specifically for community and traditional leaders working directly within their own communities on CSE acceptance. It seeks to give structured guidance and tools for running a dialogue, asking and answering questions, and navigating difficult conversations.

Starting point: Your role in the dialogue

Your role is not to “win an argument” or lecture at fellow community leaders and members. Instead, a participatory approach in which you act as a convenor rather than a persuader or advocate is recommended.

Your role as a convenor is to **create** a space for people to raise their concerns, be **heard** and work through issues that arise **without judgement** or pressure. The community’s own concerns should set the direction, and participants should be treated as people with something to contribute. This does not mean that you cannot offer knowledge or challenge mis and dis-information, rather, it means that your voice should be equally considered **alongside** the voices of everyone else.

Lead with shared values and the right terminology

Throughout this module, and the Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit as a whole, you will be guided to start from the values that a community already cares about. In practice this means leading with values such as **care, protection, and responsibility**, bringing in evidence once trust has been established.

In addition, terminology and words matter within these types of conversations. Therefore, in order to build trust and common ground, consider referencing terms commonly used within the local community to refer to CSE.

The table below provides a useful guide for how CSE is more commonly referred to in Uganda, Malawi and Ethiopia:

Malawi	“Life Skills Education” at primary level; “HIV Education” or “Sexual and Reproductive Health Education” at secondary level.
Uganda	“Sexuality Education” is taught as part of “Life Education”.
Ethiopia	“Sexual education” “AIDS education” or “life-skills education”.



BEFORE the dialogue: Planning for community engagement

Community engagements are best managed by **planning** and ensuring the right people are in the room. Start by ensuring that the chosen venue feels safe and comfortable for all participants. Throughout YPAR findings, youth referenced privacy considerations as a barrier to meaningfully engaging with CSE. As these considerations may extend to other members of the community, choosing a neutral venue that allows participants to speak freely without fear of judgment is critical.

Before hosting the dialogue, ensure that you have done the following:

STEP 01

Do your homework

Have a basic to good understanding of CSE and its associated positive outcomes. While facts and statistics alone do not change behaviour, this will help you address misconceptions and build credibility.

STEP 02

Map who needs to be involved

Start by working out who holds influence over CSE acceptance in this particular community, and who is affected by it. It may also include local officials or others whose backing (or opposition) will shape whether CSE is accepted.

STEP 03

Consider forming a community advisory group

Where you can, form a small advisory group drawn from the community to review your language, the topics you plan to raise, and the objections you are likely to meet.

STEP 04

Sensitise leaders and potential gatekeepers before the engagement

Ensure you have provided resources to high-trust stakeholders ahead of any engagements, as they are the biggest risk to the effectiveness of your session.

DURING the dialogue: Running a successful, respectful and thought-provoking dialogue

There are four key stages for running the dialogue in a community engagement. The stages are the same whether you are working with a single group or the wider community.



STAGE 01

Setting objectives and dialogue rules

Open by establishing why you are all there and how the conversation will work. Communicate your objective plainly and in the above mentioned shared-values terms. For example, you can say that you are here to talk together about how young people in this community can grow up safe, healthy, and well-prepared.

Co-create dialogue rules with the group so that there is agreement on how to react if the conversation becomes heated or difficult later on. Ask for their input, rather than imposing your own rules on them.

Some suggestions that are critical to fostering a productive engagement include:

Everyone gets a chance to speak.

No interrupting.

No judgement of what someone raises.

What is shared here is treated with respect.

STAGE 02

Start from the community's own concerns

Focus the dialogue on the community's own concerns about young people's health and wellbeing. Invite them to name these concerns themselves without pre-empting their answers. This is helpful information for you so that you can focus reflection and discussion on the topics that matter most to them, and it also signals to the participants that you are there to listen rather than only to talk. From there, guide the conversation with reflective questions rather than making statements.

These could include:



What worries you most about this?



What experiences have led you to be concerned about this?



Could you explain what this looks like in your community right now?



The aim is to unpack their concerns so that they feel completely heard and understood. Although some of their concerns may rest on mis and or dis-information, you do not need to correct them immediately. When listening to their concerns, try to identify the values that are at play. For example, a parent worried about promiscuity is actually expressing the value of **protection**, and an elder worried about the erosion of cultural practices and values is expressing the value of **community**. This can help you speak to the root of the concern and truly empathise with their fears of what accepting CSE might mean for their community.

You will need to monitor engagement and encourage input from diverse participants. This diversity will depend on the group in the room, but could run across gender, age, religion, etc.

STAGE 03

Engage the concerns and bring in evidence

Once concerns are on the table, work through them, once again leading with shared values and offering what you know as something to consider rather than a correction. Where a worry rests on mis or dis-information, put accurate information alongside it and let the group raise their thoughts and questions.

You don't have to cover each area in depth within the first engagement, but the six broad topics that could be covered in these dialogues on CSE are:



This is the stage where you will start bringing in evidence. This can take the shape of facts and findings, but it can also encompass local stories or bringing in an expert voice. You can also refer to the resources mentioned throughout the Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit as well as module 2 for country specific findings. Always keep the evidence concrete, short, and relevant to the community. By bringing evidence to the table only after people feel heard, it means the same evidence lands as help rather than as a rebuttal to what they've shared.

In order to personalise what CSE can mean for adolescents and communities. You can also share some quotes from the YPAR findings, indicating the positive effects of CSE from young people themselves:

Positive outcome 01

CSE teaches valuable life skills.

Quote from adolescent

They teach us about our rights, testin for HIV, [and] how to make decisions... like using condoms.

”

Out-of-school Youth, Male 2

After taking the [CSE] training, I know what I should use so that there won't be unplanned pregnancies or [STIs]”.

”

Positive outcome 02

Young people highlighted how learning about puberty, menstruation, and general sexual health helped them feel more prepared for adolescence.

Quote from adolescent

One in school participant from Malawi explained:

It [CSE] has really helped me. Understanding my body has been helpful, I know when and what to do.

”

Positive outcome 03

Findings indicate a desire for CSE.

Quote from adolescent

It would be good if it [CSE] came out as an independent subject... like Biology, like Chemistry.

”

In-school Youth from Ethiopia

Keep young voices at the centre.

STAGE 04

Agree on next steps

Close by drawing together what the group has agreed and what it still wants to work through. The point is not to force consensus on everything, but hopefully to find points of connection and understanding. Where a group reaches agreement, try to identify participants who would be willing to **champion** and move the conversation forward outside of your engagement. This could be a leader willing to speak to peers. Make sure to offer them support and tools so that they are equipped to lead their own conversations.

Where a group has not reached agreement, acknowledge that in the room and leave the door open to further discussion and exploration. If, however, a disagreement escalates, this is the time to slow things down. Don't try and force agreement but rather hold the space open to disagreement and to returning to the engagement at another time when everyone has had the time to process and reflect.

Not every conversation ends in agreement.

AFTER the dialogue: Don't forget to follow-up

Discussion and dialogue with community members and leaders should be part of a wider campaign to promote CSE. You may consider distributing educational materials or resources to support and reinforce your community sensitisation efforts. Behaviour shifts require ongoing interventions and cannot work with a once-off engagement.

Scripts for common objections

These are the five objections' leaders most often meet. Each script follows the same pattern:

- **Identify** the concern before it can be used against you. This does not mean that you have to repeat the claim or myth presented. You should identify what is causing it.
- **Connect** it to the value underneath it and
- **Offer evidence** as something to weigh rather than a correction.

Use the wording as a starting point and adapt it to how people actually speak in your community.

OBJECTION 01

Centres around concerns about CSE encouraging early and more risky sexual behaviour.

THE VALUE: Protection

Suggested script



You may already have heard people say that if we talk to young people about this, we're inviting them to try it. That's a fair worry, and it comes from wanting to protect our children. So let me put something next to it. What young people in this community themselves told our researchers, is that silence, not information, it is what leaves them exposed. When they don't understand what's happening to them or how to say no, that's when they're at greater risk. Age-appropriate information is there to prepare them, not to push them.

Evidence anchor

Overall YPAR findings showed that CSE generally wielded positive outcomes for young people. This included increased levels of confidence in the ability to say “no” to sex and sexual advances, to report cases of abuse, to buy and use condoms, to negotiate sexual activity.

In addition, CSE has been shown to increase informed decision making in sexual activity such as the choice to abstain from sex and avoid pregnancy, as one in-school youth noted in Uganda: *“I decided to abstain [from sex]. I am not ready to engage in those things”.*

Refer instead if

If someone asks a specific clinical or statistical question about HIV or pregnancy risk then you should rather refer to a health worker who may be better equipped.

OBJECTION 02

Centred around cultural barriers and threats to continuity of cultural values.

THE VALUE: Community and dignity

Suggested script



I hear that this feels like it's coming from outside and doesn't fit how we do things here. That worry comes from wanting to protect what makes us who we are, and that matters to me too. But let's look at what CSE is actually trying to protect. It's children who understand their own bodies, who can say no, who are not shamed into silence, and who are brave and know that if something is wrong, they can turn to a trusted adult. Those aren't foreign values; they are the same care and responsibility our own culture already asks of parents and elders. This is community protection, not a cultural threat.

Evidence anchor

YPAR research found that in each of the countries, the relevant policy frameworks that govern CSE recognise the important role of communities and multi-stakeholder engagement. This includes mothers' groups and parents in Malawi, youth and cultural clubs in Ethiopia, and local community leaders and families in Uganda.

OBJECTION 03

Centred around requests for evidence or challenges around statistical proof of CSE effectiveness.

| THE VALUE: Responsibility

Suggested script (when you want to refer to evidence)



That's a fair challenge, and it deserves a proper answer rather than a quick one. I'd rather not just throw numbers at you that you can't check for yourself. Let me point you to the written evidence brief and our evidence hub, so you can go through it and judge it on the merits.

Evidence anchor

Ask if you can show them the evidence hub on the website so that they can go through the evidence for themselves.

OR

Suggested script (when you can speak to the evidence)



That's a fair thing to ask. The evidence is actually pretty consistent. CSE is linked to safer choices, not to young people having sex earlier. But you don't have to trust me on that, should we look at the evidence together and talk it through?

Evidence anchor

Offer to look at the evidence hub with them, or to walk through it together, rather than only sending a link. The aim is shared scrutiny. It can help to invite them to test the evidence, not just receive it.

OBJECTION 04

Concerns around CSE replacing the roles of parents, families and faith.

THE VALUE: Responsibility and dignity

Suggested script



Raising young people takes all of us, family, faith and community. CSE adds to that support rather than standing in for any of it. CSE isn't there to replace you as a parent, or to replace your faith. It can't, and it isn't trying to. What it does is add another layer of support around what you're already doing to support them. It doesn't pull young people away from their families or their faith, it just gives them the language and confidence to understand themselves and their bodies and bring their questions back to you.

Evidence anchor

In Malawi, YPAR findings showed that when youth were exposed to CSE, they were more likely to follow advice from teachers and parents, not take away from their authority.

Cross-refer to the parent-facing FAQ and PTA meeting materials in parallel, which carry this same message for a parent audience.

Illustrative dialogue scripts

The script below shows the flow described above in practice. The facilitator lines are marked F and the other speaker is marked by their role.

Script: An honest concern expressed at the community level dialogue

Community member or leader:



If we start teaching this in the school, aren't we just telling our children it's fine to start having sex?

F:



That's a real worry, and I think most people in this room share it. Can you tell me a bit more about your concern. Can you tell me what you have seen or heard that makes you worried about this?

Community member or leader:



I've heard that in other places, once children learn about this, they start experimenting earlier.

F:



Thank you for being honest about that. What I hear is that you want to protect your child, and that you don't want the school doing anything that puts them at more risk. Is that right?

Community member or leader:



Yes, exactly.

F:



I want to put something next to that worry, not against it. What young people in this community have told researchers is that it's silence, not information, that leaves them exposed. YPAR findings, which come from young person's themselves, found that when they don't understand what's happening to them, adolescents feel as if they can't protect themselves or say no. So age-appropriate teaching is actually there to prepare them, not to push them toward anything.

Community member or leader:



I hadn't thought of it that way. I'd still want to know what exactly is being taught to my child, at what age.

F:



That's a fair thing to ask for, and it's your right as a parent. Let's make sure you get the actual materials for your child's age group before this goes any further, so you can see for yourself rather than take my word for it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

(click on the image to access)

