

Community Negotiation Checklist

Questions to ask before, during and after engaging with communities

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BEFORE THE NEGOTIATION

- Have I mapped who influences decisions beyond formal leaders?** Include women, youth, religious actors, elders, volunteers, host and displaced groups, service providers, and informal power holders.
- Who is affected but not represented in the room?** Check whether those most affected can share concerns safely.
- Have I checked whether formal approval equals real acceptance?** Approval from authorities or leaders may not mean households, women, youth, or marginalized groups accept the activity.
- Do I understand competing definitions of fairness?** Prepare to explain why one vulnerability, risk, or need is prioritized over another.
- Do I know what is flexible and what is not?** Clarify what can be adapted and what cannot change, such as staff safety, protection standards, or eligibility criteria.
- Have I explored alternative solutions and contingency options?** Be clear about who else may be able to help and what can be done if needs exceed available resources or the planned activity cannot proceed as expected.

DURING THE NEGOTIATION

- Am I listening for the concern behind the position?** A refusal may reflect fear, shame, mistrust, reputation, safety, exclusion, underlying values or social norms or lack of recognition.
- Am I de-escalating before explaining?** When emotions are high, take time to acknowledge people's concerns, frustrations or disappointment before presenting technical constraints.
- Am I watching for trigger points?** Notice silence, facial expressions, discomfort, interruptions, or withdrawal; pause or reframe if the wording closes the conversation.
- Can the activity be made acceptable through practical adjustments?** Consider separate sessions, trusted facilitators, timing, female staff, safer venues, group movement, or clearer follow-up.
- Can the community contribute without taking on inappropriate responsibility?** Explore safeguarding, accountability, local knowledge, communication, or feasible alternatives.

AFTER THE NEGOTIATION

- Have I checked whether the agreement created new tensions?** Monitor who benefited, who was left out, and whether new protection risks appeared.
- Have I followed up beyond the first agreement?** Repeat key messages, correct rumours, and check whether different groups understood the decision.
- Am I treating community behaviour as feedback?** Refusal, resale, non-attendance, rumours, or resistance may show that the response does not match actual needs.
- Have I documented what changed and why?** Record concerns, options discussed, compromises, safeguards, and the reasoning behind decisions.