



**Practical guidelines  
for conducting  
effective mothers  
meetings: A handbook**

# **Practical guidelines for conducting effective mothers meetings: A handbook**

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## **Introduction:**

Conducting mothers meetings at the village/community level are a very useful, powerful strategy to reach women to promote desired behavior change in the domains of women and child health, education, income generation, life skills education, even for religious teachings and other areas.

Like the saying goes, *if the woman in the family is educated, the entire family is enlightened.*

A better informed/ educated woman can take care of herself as well as her family. She would ensure that her children are:

- well cared for,
- well nursed,
- well immunized,
- they go to school, they are educated

Mothers meetings can play very important role in informing, educating and empowering women.

If these meetings are poorly organized and conducted, it can affect the gains of the programme at the community level and lose its significance.

Often, the community level workers who are from the same community face barriers and limitations in conducting result-oriented meetings.

## **Why mothers meetings in Polio plus programme?**

In high risk blocks alone, over ----- number of mothers meetings are conducted every month. The question to be asked is how effective are these mothers meetings conducted?

Mothers meetings are a useful medium to promote polio prevention messages, discuss how children become vulnerable to polio, various risks involved, educate them on importance of Routine immunization, initiation of early and exclusive breast feeding, sanitation and hygiene, give messages on diarrhea management and overall child care messages can be promoted.

These meetings can be made effective, interesting, meeting the needs of the members. Focus should be given on few important points' right from planning stage to implementation and to the follow up stage.

This handbook is developed to help the community mobilisers, frontline workers, NGO workers and other volunteers, to conduct mothers meetings effectively.

## **Who facilitates mothers meetings?**

Mothers meetings as a strategy can be facilitated by the local community level workers, Anganwadi worker, ASHA, community mobilisers, NGO workers, and volunteers.

## **What does this handbook include?**

The handbook addresses the challenges of conducting effective mothers meetings at the community level. Drawing on the collective insights of the many people and field observations and interactions, this handbook provides practical understanding and input for making the mothers meetings effective and result oriented.

**While planning for a mothers meeting, answer some questions, which would help you to organize the meeting better.**

- What are the objectives of mothers meetings?
- What is the outcome expected?
- Which are the issues you plan to address in this meeting?
- What preparations are required?
- Who will be the participants?
- When and where will be the meeting conducted?

## **Setting objectives for the mothers meeting:**

### **The objective defines the purpose and content of the meeting**

Establish the objectives for mothers meeting. The objectives of the meeting will affect the way the meeting is planned and facilitated. Think of one or more key objective/s for the meeting, examples could be as below:

- Educate about the new vaccinations included in the RI schedule
- Increase fully immunized children in the community
- Address any myths, misinformation, fears and challenges about Routine Immunization
- Encourage mothers to participate in the village health and nutrition day
- Encourage early & exclusive breast feeding among the mothers of new born and pregnant mothers
- Teaching community members the importance of hand washing and demonstrating how to do it
- Educating women on diarrhea management & Imparting skills to prepare ORS at home
- Encourage mothers to bring their children up to 5yrs of age to the booth for OPV on the SNID/NIDs
- Addressing myths and rumors

## Arranging for logistics:

- ① **Venue:** should be accessible, comfortable for most of the members; It should be clean and preferably should have basic amenities like drinking water, toilet.
- ① It could be a community members' house or in an open place behind the houses, under the trees where there is shade, which is comfortable for all
- ① **Day & Date:** decide on a date which most sited for the women so as to participate
- ① **Time:** should be convenient for the women
- ① **Duration:** take care that the duration of the meeting is not too long. Meeting can be for 40 minutes to an hour.
- ① **Number of participants:** Plan to invite around 12-15 people in a meeting, if there are too many people in the meeting, it would be un fruitful and cumbersome without proper arrangements for seating, may not be audible, and may interrupt the flow of discussions.
- ① **Getting the right members:**
  - Determine who the participants should be in line with your theme
  - Restrict the number of participants to a maximum of 15 members

- Make a list of house-holds for home visits
- Visit the households and inform about the date, venue, time and purpose of the meeting, seek confirmation of their participation
- Tick on your list of the confirmed households and make an estimated list of participants
- Remind them one day before the meeting
- If there is a woman community leader, make sure you invite her to the meeting.
- Brief her prior to the meeting on what you are expecting to discuss.

*It is important to invite the local woman community leaders to the meeting once in a while to boost your agenda and get the support*

This would avoid any differences in the point of view and you can get the support of the leader.

### **Preparation for the meeting:**

- Write down points to discuss during the meeting
- Organize IEC materials that are required for the meeting to use, display and to distribute
- Organize relevant handouts with ASHA, AWW (ORS sachets, ZINC tablets, if applicable)

### **On the day of the meeting:**

- Arrange for the seating of the participants, if they have to be seated on the floor, make sure there are mats or Dharis to put on the floor. If there are chairs available, organize the seating which is best suited for the discussions, preferably in a circle. **It is important for the community worker to sit along with the mothers group.**
- If the duration of the meeting is expected to be longer, make facility for drinking water
- Organize for the local drum (Tabla/ Dholak) if you are planning for the folk song as part of the meeting to create a conducive environment for the meeting.

## Conducting the meeting:

- Greet the members when you begin your meeting
- Welcome the participants and inquire about their wellbeing which helps in warming up
- Do a round of introduction
- Sing along a folk song with the group members, if this is a community practice.
- Notify the objectives and purpose of the meeting and how you plan to conduct
- Highlight the key issues to be discussed
- Get the opinion of the group on the theme being discussed.
- Make a thorough presentation on the themes chosen
- Ask questions in between the discussions to see if the members are following the discussions
- Make it a systematic and interactive meeting.
- Speak in simple language and use less technical terms



- Effective use of visual materials, like flipchart, flash cards, to get the attention, and disseminate the messages.
- Open the floor for discussion. Address questions, clarify doubts, myths and fears, and link them with services available at the community level.
- Recap and reinforce the key learnings of the discussion and.
- Make specific mention if any group member has contributed to the organizing part of the meeting.
- Decide on the date, time and theme for the next meeting before leaving the group. A coordinator can be identified from among the mothers who could facilitate gathering of the community members to the meeting.
- Conclude the session by thanking the group members

**Follow up:**

- Unaddressed need, Unanswered questions need to be noted down, to get the right answers and solutions for the next meeting.
- Note down the promises you make during the meetings to individuals in the group and make sure that you remember to fulfill your promise in a possible way.

## **Example: Process of planning a mothers meeting**

### **Determine the objective:**

**The objective of the meeting is to increase fully immunized children in the community**

### **Who are my audience?**

### **How do I know who to call?**

- Refer to the micro plan made of the community
- List all the households which have new born children, children under 2yrs and pregnant women.
- Make home visits to these households; find out the status of the immunization to their children and their opinions on the immunization.
- Segregate & prioritize the issues concerning

### **Findings from the households can be as below:**

- They are following RI schedule well from either the government services or private practitioner
- Some of them are not aware of the importance of RI and the details
- Some have initiated but have dropped in between because the health worker was rude, the child got fever and swelling, could not see the child crying with pain, the vaccine was not available that day, the health center is far away, she needs to go for work and does not get free time, she thinks the few injections given will be enough.

### **What do you do?**

- In coordination with the ASHA and Anganwadi, prioritize the needs which most of the women face
- If there are RI sessions planned in the near future, your objective is to motivate some of the mothers, whose child is due for vaccination to come to the health center or the RI site.
- Identify some mothers/ grandmothers who are supporters of your work at the community level to be invited for the meeting.
- Invite the mothers of children who are dropped in between the immunization.
- Think about what you will say and prepare the messages accordingly.
- Go ahead and conduct the meeting.

## Some problems in conducting the mothers meeting and possible solution

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Possible Solution</b>
Bringing people in one places	Make home visits and invite and encourage members individually and build relationship, Visit places where women gather for religious occasions or other informal gatherings, mingle with the community.
What topic to cover in a group meeting	When you meet people in informal setting, ask about their well-being and know about their problems. From among the problems you would be able to identify topics and set objectives for the meeting.
Meeting doesn't start on time and less number of people attend meeting	Try to remind people just before the meeting and start bringing them with you while on your way to venue. If you make the meetings interesting and meaningful, the mothers will start to recognize the importance of participating in it. But, ensure that date, time, duration, and the venue are suitable for most of the members.

People apart from target group or unintended (anwanchit log) people come in the session	Be polite to them but focus on your targeted audience.
Few people influence all others or tries to digress the topic of the meeting	As a facilitator, you would require to give direction to the discussions, manage those who are digressing the topic and encourage those who are not speaking to put forward their opinion
Few people do not express their opinion or feelings because of hesitation	Create an enabling environment for everyone to feel comfortable and open up during discussions. It is important to be aware of the community practices, e.g. new daughter in laws do not talk when mother in law and other elders are present. Get the support of community members and encourage people to participate.

### **How to report after meetings?**

One page report should be fine capturing key discussion areas, decisions if any made at a meeting should be recorded. The written record of a meeting or brief report or minutes should show:

- the date of the meeting
- who attended

- a summary of the discussion that took place
- what decisions were made
- what follow-up action is needed and who will do it
- the timelines for follow up action
- The venue/time of next meeting.

## **What is a successful meeting and what is an unsuccessful meeting?**

A successful meeting is where:

- the facilitator follows an agenda
- everyone has the opportunity to participate in the discussions
- everyone is clear about what is happening
- there is sensitivity to people's different cultural backgrounds
- the facilitator is neutral and invites everyone to participate
- the atmosphere is open and respectful
- Everyone leaves with a sense of achievement.

**An unsuccessful meeting is where:**

- a few people dominate discussion
- decisions are not made and agenda items are carried on from one meeting to the next
- there is confusion, conflict, anger and fighting
- new people feel unwelcome
- few people understand the procedures
- the facilitator goes through decisions and pushes their own ideas
- The agenda is ignored.

## **FAQs for Community Meetings, Influencers and Mothers**

(Or simply ‘Listen, Discuss and clear your doubts.’)

1. **QUESTION:** Why rounds of Polio Protection campaign are being conducted again and again?

**Answer:** By conducting repeated rounds, infection of uncontrolled virus will be checked and the virus will not get any place to sustain and grow and as a result the virus will itself perish. According to the specialists, all the children under the age of one year should be given doses of polio drops for at least ten times and, further children under five years should also be given doses for ten or more times. And for this reason, the polio campaign is being conducted again and again so that all the children are benefited from it. So it is absolutely necessary that pulse polio campaign should be continued even at places where polio has been rooted out so that virus arriving from outside should not get any place to grow.

2. **Question:** Why some children are afflicted by polio disease in spite of the fact that they are taking O.P.V (Polio dose given through mouth)?

**Answer:** Some children although having taken polio doses many times are not able to develop strength in themselves, and main reason for this is that such children

may be having some other health related problems and other infections such as diarrhea etc. are not allowing the polio doses to be effective. The second point is that mal nutrition weakens the strength of children to fight against the disease. The third point is that even O.P.V. has its limitations; it means that it is not necessary that by taking it, cent percent children acquire sufficient strength to fight against the disease. Hence owing to above reasons, unfortunately, the child is afflicted by the polio disease although he has been taking polio drops.

3. **Question:** Does polio dose lead to impotence?

**Answer:** No, there is no impotence due to any dose of polio. This is simply a rumour. In fact, polio dose is one of safest doses in the world and has been in use for the last forty years. By giving these doses many times, the child is saved from polio. All the communities are making use of this dose, so much so that our neighboring countries Bangladesh and Pakistan are also using it. This polio dose is being utilized successfully by many countries of the world since sixth decade of last century. In India also, children of all the communities are taking this dose. Only two drops of any medicine do not lead to impotence.

4. **Question:** It may be possible that dose is not working effectively?

**Answer:** With polio dose, polio virus has been eradicated from many countries of the world and many states of India. This dose is liked by all and its utilization has been permitted by World Health Organization and Government of India after conducting thorough tests, examination and verifications. Of course, there is no deficiency in the quality of dose and its effectiveness. When the temperature is not controlled there may occur some deficiency in effectiveness of the dose. However, by keeping this fact in view 'cold chain' has been arranged in which dose is kept on lower temperature with the help of artificial cooling equipment. When there is change in quality, the same is reflected on the phial of dose. Phial of useless dose is thrown away.

5. **Question:** Should new born babies be given polio dose?

**Answer:** Yes, dose can be given to children, born a few hours ago. The small children are more exposed to danger. So they may be given this dose immediately. This dose is safe, effective and free from ill effects. By administering it to children they will develop strength to fight against the disease.

6. **Question:** Some children have been given dose recently. Should such children be given an additional dose?

**Answer:** Yes, during polio pulse campaign it is necessary that such children should be given an additional dose. By these doses, the uncontrolled virus does not find place in a community. During regular defense sessions also, dose should be given to guard against polio disease.

7. **Question:** Should a child suffering from diarrhea be given this dose?

**Answer:** Yes. It will not have any adverse effect.

8. **Question:** Has this dose any bad effect on a sick child who is being given other medicines?

**Answer:** No, This will not have any bad effect as this dose is only for protection against polio. It will have no ill effect on medicines being given for curing other diseases.

9. **Question:** My child has been given this dose 12 to 15 times. Does he still need O.P.V?

**Answer:** Yes. So long as virus exists in the environment, the children should be continuously protected. Giving polio dose many a time is absolutely essential. Additional doses add to the strength to fight against the disease and it helps in eradicating uncontrolled virus from the community.

10. **Question:** My child has received all the doses of polio. Will regular protection be arranged in due course?

**Answer:** Yes, it will be conducted as per schedule. Dose being given in polio round protect only from polio whereas other medicines which are given during regular vaccination protect from other diseases such as TB, Diphtheria, Whooping cough, Tetanus and Measles etc...

11. **Question:** How long pulse polio rounds will be conducted? Will O.P.V. activities be stopped immediately?

**Answer:** We will be able to root out polio from the country for good only when we conduct polio campaign in its full swing, this campaign will be conducted for some more years. The campaign will be kept running even after the last patient has been cured so that it may be ensured that virus has perished completely.

12. **Question:** While moving from house to house why other protective vaccinations are not given?

**Answer:** Other vaccinations are imparted with injections which can be done only by trained health workers. Besides this its essentials that needle should be disinfected. Due to these reasons injections can be given by a trained person at a specific place.

13. **Question:** When the children are suffering from other serious diseases, why so much emphasis on polio only?

**Answer:** For other diseases, vaccination and treatment is possible which is available at health centers but disease of polio is incurable but easily preventable. We can guard against this disease by giving two drops of polio dose regularly at every round to child up to the age of five and polio can be rooted out. Thus, with the intensive campaign of polio there has been tremendous decrease in the number of polio patients and for this many high quality rounds have been conducted.

