

FGD GUIDE

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FGD stands for Focus Group Discussion. It is a group discussion of approximately 6 - 12 persons guided by a facilitator, during which group members talk freely and spontaneously about a certain topic.

FGD is a qualitative method of research. Its purpose is to obtain in-depth information on concepts, perceptions and ideas of a group. An FGD aims to be more than a question-answer interaction. The idea is that group members discuss the topic among themselves, with guidance from the facilitator.

The FGD facilitator should have the quality to control the person who is dominating the group and encourage the shy participants. He or she should have the power to handle the situation if any conflict arises. The Note taker should have to note each and every verbal and non verbal comments, expressions and even emotions.

HOW TO CONDUCT A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

FGD requires good knowledge of local conditions. Communities are seldom or never homogeneous. There are always differences between community members, for example in education, political power, gender, economic status and ethnic group. These differences will be reflected in their perceptions of the problems they suffer from and possible solutions. A researcher must be aware of these differences, otherwise (s) he may miss important groups of participants. Similarly, (s) he must know which key persons or organizations could be good entry points for the selection of participants in the FGDs (e.g.: women's groups, parent associations, health department, political leaders etc.). The first task of the researcher(s) will be to explore the area and identify possible target groups. Interviews with some key informants and a rudimentary situation analysis are then indispensable. The situation analysis should preferably be carried out in a participatory way, with representatives of the study population on which the FGD focuses.

Recruitment of participants:

- Participants should be roughly of the same socio-economic group or have a similar background in relation to the issue under investigation. The age and sexual composition of the group should facilitate free discussion.

- Always ensure confidentiality of opinions: Ask co-operation from the group members as well, to keep what has been discussed confidential. If group members present very personal problems and need advice or help, this should be followed up after the FGD.
- Participants should be invited at least a day or two in advance, and the general purpose and procedures of the FGD should be explained, in order to obtain their consent to join.

- **Selection of participants:**

If you are an outsider in the research area, you may have to rely on your key informants for the first selection of participants in FGDs. Your key informants to whom you have explained thoroughly the purpose and the process of the FGD might each suggest some individuals who could be invited to a focus group discussion.

Note that the key informants may select persons similar to themselves so that you do not get an adequate variety of views in your discussion group. So in your explanations be sure to emphasize that you want a group of people that can express a *range* of views, to be able to have a proper discussion. Participants in a first FGD may assist to find relevant participants for other groups.

Another way of getting participants is to conveniently select individuals in a *systematic* way, to try and ensure a range of views. You might, for example, ask every third or fourth person you find. This method might be more suitable in urban areas.

- **Physical arrangements:**

Communication and interaction during the FGD should be encouraged in every way possible. Arrange the chairs in a circle. Make sure that there will be no disturbances, sufficient quietness, adequate lighting, etc. Try to hold the FGD in a neutral setting which encourages participants to freely express their views. A health centre, **for example**, is not a good place to discuss traditional medical beliefs or preferences for other types of treatment.

- **Preparation of a discussion guide:**

There should be a **written** list of topics to be covered. It can be formulated as a series of open-ended questions.

Conducting the session

One of the members of the research team should act as ‘facilitator’ or ‘moderator’ for the focus group discussion. One should serve as ‘note taker’. The facilitator

should preferably be as close as possible to the participants in their characteristics (same sex, roughly same age, etc.).

Role of the facilitator

The facilitator should NOT act as an expert on the topic. His or her role is to stimulate and support discussion.

- **Introduce the session**

Introduce yourself as facilitator and introduce the note taker. Let participants introduce themselves with whatever names they wish to use. Put the participants at ease and explain the purpose of the FGD, the kind of information needed, and how the information will be used (for the planning of a health program, an education program, etc). Ask permission to use a tape-recorder, let people hear their own voices before the session starts.

- **Encourage discussion**

Be enthusiastic, lively, and humorous and show your interest in the groups' ideas. Formulate questions and encourage as many participants as possible to express their views. Remember there are **no** 'right' or 'wrong' answers. **React neutrally** to both verbal and non-verbal responses.

- **Encourage involvement**

Avoid a question-and-answer session. Some useful techniques include:

— Asking for clarification:
'Can you tell me more about. . .?'

— Reorienting the discussion when it goes 'off the track':
Saying: 'Wait, how does this relate to. . .?'

Saying: 'Interesting point, but how about. . .?'
Using one participant's remark to direct a question to another, for example, 'Mr. X said. . ., but how about you, Mr. Y?'

— When dealing with a dominant participant, avoiding eye contact or turning slightly away to discourage the person from speaking, or thanking the person and changing the subject.

— When dealing with a reluctant participant, using the person's name, requesting his/her opinion, making more frequent eye contact to encourage his/her participation.

- Deal correctly with **sensitive issues**. If you notice that the discussion stops when dealing with a sensitive topic, you could ask participants (if literate) to anonymously write down their responses or opinions on the topic. Alternatively, you could summarize for the group some of the opinions from previous focus group discussions, focusing on one or two major contrasting opinions. Still another strategy is to form *sub-groups*, and to get a member of the sub-group to summarize and present the opinions of their sub-group members after which the whole group can still discuss these opinions.

- **Build rapport,**

Observe non-verbal communication. Ask yourself, ‘What are they saying? What does it mean to them?’ Be aware of your own tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and those of the participants.

- **Avoid being placed in the role of expert**

When asked for **your** ideas or views by a respondent, remember that you are not there to educate or inform. Direct the questions back to the group by saying: ‘What do you think’, ‘What would you do?’ Set aside time, if necessary, after the session to give participants the information they have asked for.

Do not try to comment on everything that is being said. Don’t feel you have to say something during every pause in the discussion. Wait a little and see what happens.

- **Control the rhythm of the meeting, but in an unobtrusive way**

Listen carefully, and move the discussion from topic to topic. Subtly control the time allocated to various topics so as to maintain interest. If participants spontaneously jump from one topic to another, let the discussion continue for a while since useful additional information may surface; then summarize the points brought up and reorient the discussion.

- **Take time at the end of the meeting to summarize, check for agreement and thank the participants**

Summarize the main issues brought up, check whether all agree and ask for additional comments. Thank the participants and let them know that their ideas have been a valuable contribution and will be used for planning the proposed research, intervention, or health education materials.

- Listen for **additional comments** and spontaneous discussions which occur after the meeting has been closed.

Role of the note taker

The note taker should keep a record of the content of the discussion as well as emotional reactions and important aspects of group interaction. Assessment of the emotional tone of the meeting and the group process will enable you to judge the validity of the information collected during the FGD.

Items to be recorded include:

- Date, time, place
- Names and characteristics of participants
- General description of the group dynamics (level of participation, presence of a dominant participant, level of interest)
- Opinions of participants, recorded as much as possible in their own words, especially for key statements
- Emotional aspects (e.g., reluctance, strong feelings attached to certain opinions)
- Vocabulary used - particularly in FGDs that are intended to assist in developing questionnaires or health education materials
- Spontaneous relevant discussions during breaks or after the meeting has been closed

It is highly recommended that a tape-recorder be used to assist in capturing information. Even if a tape-recorder is used, notes should be taken as well, in case the machine malfunctions and so that information will be available immediately after the session for discussion.

If there is no reliable tape-recorder available, it is advisable to have two **note takers**.

A **supplementary role** for the note taker could be to assist the facilitator (if necessary) by drawing his or her attention to:

- missed comments from participants
- missed topics (the note taker should have a copy of the discussion guide during the FGD)

If necessary, the recorder could also help resolve conflict situations within the group that the facilitator finds difficult to handle on his or her own.

- **Number of sessions**

The number of focus group sessions to be conducted depends upon project needs, resources, and whether new information is still coming from the sessions, (that is, whether contrasting views within and between various groups in the community are still emerging). If not, you may stop.

One should plan to conduct at least two FGDs for each sub-group (for example, two for males and two for females). Otherwise you have no way of assessing whether the information you get from the first FGD is representative for that group.

- **Duration**

A focus group session typically lasts up to an hour and a half. Generally the first session with a particular type of group is longer than the following ones because all of the information is new. Thereafter, if it becomes clear that all the groups have a similar opinion on particular topics, the facilitator may be able to move the discussion along more quickly to other topics which still elicit new points of view.

PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- After each focus group session the facilitator and note taker should meet to review and **complete the notes** taken during the meeting. This is the right moment to **evaluate** how the focus group went and what changes might be made in the topics when facilitating the next focus group.

Immediately afterwards a full report of the discussion should be prepared which reflects the discussion as completely as possible, using the participants' own words. List the key statements, ideas, and attitudes expressed for each topic of discussion.

REPORT WRITING

Start with a description of the purpose of the FGDs, the selection and composition of the groups of FGD participants and a commentary on the group process, so the reader can assess the validity of the reported findings.

Present your findings, following your list of topics and guided by the objective(s) of your FGD.

Designing the Discussion Guide

The purpose of the discussion guide is to provide an overall direction for the discussion. It is not the equivalent of a survey instrument and is not to be followed in detail or even necessarily in order. The guide provides the moderator with topics and issues that are, to the extent possible, to be covered at some point during the group discussion. The guide is loosely structured and does not suggest potential responses

The guide should proceed logically from one topic to another, and from the general to the specific. It is often useful to have broad questions at the start, to enable the moderator to get the feel of the group, and to contextualise later and more specific responses. Questions that are more important to the research agenda should be presented early in the session, if possible. Questions should be unstructured, unbiased, non-threatening, and very simple. Specification should almost always be left to the participants, unless the discussion is decidedly 'off track' at which time the moderator should gently redirect it.

The guide should not be overly detailed or have too many questions. A good focus group interview guide consists of twenty questions or less. Pre-testing the guide with several 'mock' focus groups is essential. The aim is to structure questions so that they are clear and stimulate discussion. Several stages of revisions may be necessary before the guide is ready to be used (ibid.).

Discussion Guide is composed of open ended question focused on the Objectives. The following guide line is developed to find out the reasons of "Low coverage of EPI".

Note: Discussion Guide is not a closed ended questionnaire used for quantitative studies. It is a guide for the facilitator to focus on the objective and guide the participants properly.