

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) #1

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a method for collecting data from a group of community members to discuss a specific topic. Questions are open-ended, with the aim of stimulating an informal discussion to get a deeper understanding of the context, including people's beliefs and values, social and cultural characteristics, power dynamics, capacities, and perceptions.

This exercise therefore supports you and your team to investigating people's views in more detail than is possible through a survey.

A FGD can be used throughout the project cycle, e.g.: during assessments to understand contexts and needs; during planning to design and prioritise solutions, during implementation to get feedback to understand what could be improved in the future.

Step 1

PLANNING THE FGD

Two people are required to do a FGD: a facilitator of the discussion and a notetaker.

If none of the two speak the local language fluently, an interpreter is needed too.

A question guide needs to be prepared in advance to guide the discussion. Make sure that questions asked are well suited for the participants envisioned and that questions are open-ended and neutral. Also make sure that you are prepared to manage expectation during the discussion, e.g., in case questions concerning potential support comes up or if requests for support are articulated.

Test the guide with the interpreter to ensure questions translate well and are appropriate in the given context.

Consider in advance whether to provide food and refreshments, but do not pay people to take part.

Decide already at this stage how you will feedback to those participating in- and assisting the planning of the FGD.

There are template examples available with this tool. If using one of these templates, do tailor the questions to your specific needs to ensure the FDG is as valuable as possible to your intervention.

Facilitator tip

Be aware of your own bias, position and pre-existing knowledge when developing the questions. Are the questions developed leading or are they in fact open and neutral, for example? It can be helpful to practice the FGD in advance with co-workers and interpreter to catch any unforeseen issues or misunderstandings.

Step 2

SETTING THE GROUP AND LOCATION

INFORMATION

PHASE
EXPLORATION

TIMEFRAME
120-240 MINS

MODE
FACE-TO-FACE

PARTICIPANTS
6 - 12

FACILITATION LEVEL
MEDIUM

As FGDs are to stimulate an open and constructive discussion, it is key to consider local dynamics, power relations and potential bias, when selecting who should participate. These dynamics should also be considered if help is offered locally to identify participants, e.g., participants being selected by community leaders.

Also, the participation of a community leader may affect the answers people provide. A good 'tactic' to accommodate an interested community leader, is to have another member of the team conduct a key informant interview with the community leader at the same time as the FGD

Limit the number of people taking part to a maximum of 12, otherwise the conversation can be difficult to manage. Ask the for help locally (e.g., from community- volunteers or representative) to help you manage numbers and offer to organise an additional FGD if more people are keen to participate so they don't feel excluded.

Identify a private space to hold the FGD to avoid lots of people listening in. Reach out to local partners for help in choosing location and the right timing of the FGD to accommodate people's other priorities and chores.

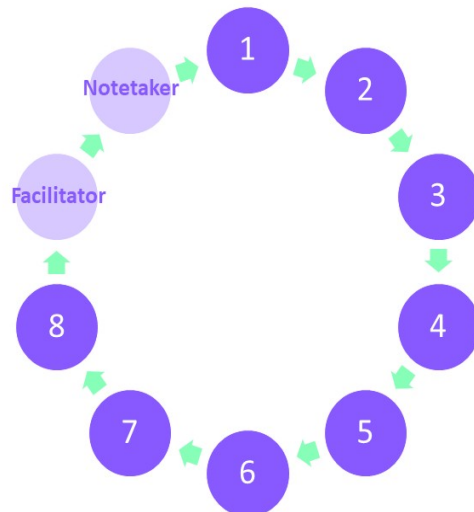
Facilitator tip

Understand your position and what expectations that might create when reaching out to communities. Be very aware that additional considerations and care apply if FGD are considered to be conducted with children and vulnerable groups! E.g., unintendedly to revoke or reproduce trauma by the topic or questions asked or the setting chose.

Step 3

INITIATING THE FGD

When meeting the focus group, have people sit in a circle as per the below diagram, so everyone can see each other.



The facilitator and notetaker should sit next to each other for easy communication, if need be.

Everyone should be seated at the same level i.e., avoid, for example, that the facilitator and notetaker are sitting on chairs, with everyone else on the ground.

Facilitator tips

Acknowledge it is a staged situation, where people at first may be reserved and/or full of questions. Try to make the atmosphere as relaxed and pleasant as possible to enable an open

discussion. To enable this, some informal conversation about whatever could interest the group, can be an idea to get the group to feel comfortable.

Step 4

CONDUCTING THE FGD

At the beginning:

- Introduce yourself, *explain very carefully the purpose and duration of the FGD* and allow the participants to also introduce themselves. Ensure to be very clear about how participants contribution will help your work.
- Ask for people's consent to participate and permission to take notes.
- Explain clearly that participation in the FGD does not guarantee people will receive support, nor do people have to take part to receive support.
- Set ground rules at the beginning, such as everyone has a right to speak, not to interrupt one another, there is no right answer, people can opt not to answer a question, and that anything shared should be kept confidential in the group.

During the FGD:

- Don't stick rigidly to the questions in your guide and rush through them. An FGD is an open conversation, not a survey or group interview. Therefore, ask follow-up questions if something interesting comes up. Keep in mind that you are doing the FGD to get wiser on how to do your intervention in the best and most effective possible manner.
- Don't ask 'yes/no' questions or leading questions (i.e., 'do you agree that...?'). Do not judge what people say - listen openly, even if you disagree, and do not react negatively to people's answer. Both facilitator and notetaker should remain neutral.
- Ask sensitive questions in a respectful and sensitive way and recognize when to move on if a topic is making people feel uncomfortable. People will only share good information with you, if they feel comfortable.
- Encourage everyone to speak. If someone is not talking, ask for their opinion. If someone is talking too much, ask what the rest of the group thinks. Be sensitive and curious to those who don't speak much. Don't press anyone to talk but see if they can be encouraged.
- If people raise issues linked to protection or sexual exploitation and abuse, let them talk as much as they want to but do not ask them for details in front of the group. Speak to them separately at the end of the FGD and ask their permission to follow up on the issue and take their contact details. You may need to refer this to a Protection, Gender and Inclusion specialist or your manager.

At the end

- Ask people if they have any questions for you. Allow people time to reflect a bit on whether they have any questions.
- Explain what will happen after this FGD and how the participants will get feedback. Be very careful not to make any promises or raise expectations about what comes next.
- Thank everyone for their time, restate how the participants contribution will help your work and ensure to let them know the value of their contribution and their time spent with you.

Facilitator tips

Already at the beginning of the discussion, be observant of dynamics in the group to catch and respond to groupthink bias. Keep in mind that the objective of the discussion is to get a deeper understanding of the context, including people's beliefs and values, social and cultural

Step 5

AFTER THE FGD

As soon as possible after the FDG, review the notes and add any additional details so they are not forgotten.

Debrief with the team to capture any additional information about group dynamics that affects the information shared or to capture any changes needed for the next FGD. The richer information you can make the information about motivations, hopes, dreams, fears, desires etc. the better information you get to inform your intervention and the enablers of it.

Ensure to provide feedback to the those who was involved in organising, planning, and enabling the FGD on the outcomes from the FGD, how the inputs will be used and the planned next steps (e.g., the community leader, representatives, or local volunteers). Too often communities take part in FGDs and then never hear from the agency again and this affects their willingness to take part in future discussions.

In respect of the time of the FGD participants' time, make sure to analyse and use the information collected during the FGD. Failing to effectively use the inputs gather can lead to frustrations and survey fatigue in communities and is a waste of everyone's time.

When in exploration mode, the FGD findings should feed into the assessment data to complement and nuance quantitative data. It will provide a deeper understanding of the community context and the things difficult to immediately see like motivations, hopes, dreams, fears, desires etc.. It should moreover inform how the community can participate in the planning phase.