



# FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

## Purpose

Focus group discussions (FGDs) help implementers understand the existing practices and beliefs of caregivers, fathers, elderly women, and older siblings around child feeding, caring, hygiene, and health seeking practices. It is a useful tool to try and grasp more information about the context that you cannot fully comprehend from the situational analysis and PDI findings.

It is optional to use FGDs after the other activities if needed to understand the context further regarding food taboos, barriers due to disability, feeding, hygiene, health-seeking and caring practices if further understanding of the context is needed. FGDs could also be used with adolescents to understand the role of older siblings in the care of younger children or caregivers of children with disability and/or representatives from Disabled Peoples Organization (DPO) to understand the major barriers and existing services available in the community to support children with disability.

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For further information about this or other nutrition tools and publications, contact [health@wvi.org](mailto:health@wvi.org).

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**Materials:**

- FGD Sample Questions and Summary Table (Annex A)
- FGD Role Play Exercise (Annex B)

**Duration:** The length of FGD can vary depending on the number of questions, but ideally should not exceed 1.5 hours.

**Facilitators:** Ensure there are 3 facilitators in the FGD who are good at speaking the local language (for interviewing and recording). If different groups are leading different FGDs, you may require more facilitators who speak the local language.

One will act as the FGD facilitator, one will take notes, and one will act as an assistant to help deal with group dynamics.

**Community members:** 8 to 12 participants with the same characteristics or background (homogenous). Homogeneity is required because, in a mixed group, people may be reluctant to speak in front of more affluent or more educated peers, for example. Therefore, it is essential to plan with community members to ensure representation and participation of women, girls, men, and boys as well as holding separate discussions with marginalized or more vulnerable sub-populations.

1. Table 1 should be modified as needed to suit the audience. It can be used with men, women, or adolescents, with some modification. The FGDs can or should be carried out with all the group listed chart, adding households with MVC/disabled/the poorest as another FGD group. Since the FGDs are intended to give insights on the practices and situations of the most vulnerable families, ensure that participants for the FGDs include representatives from households with MVCs, the poorest, and households who have children with disabilities. It is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of questions for all areas. Interviewers will need to probe to dig into the root cause of the problem areas discussed.
2. Ensure that the interviewers have the necessary interviewing skills and that they undergo any necessary (refresher) training.
3. Get the respondents' consent to join the discussion and to have the FGD recorded.
4. Review the questions before you begin and select an appropriate sub-set of questions for each type of respondent. Create separate interview guides for each, including various topics for Focus Group Discussion, which can be chosen depending on the priority issues you want to assess based on your earlier assessment results. The questions can be asked to different groups of participants, such as mothers, fathers, grandmothers, adolescent girls, adolescent boys, Community Health Workers and faith leaders.

**Other helpful resources:****1. How to Conduct a Successful Focus Group Discussion**

A short blog covering basic principles on how to conduct an FGD, from developing the questionnaire, selecting the participants, and moderating the group discussion. It does not discuss how to analyze the FGD results, but is a good overview of FGD as a data collection method.

## 2. Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews

An 18-page module on how to design, prepare and conduct FGD. It has some useful tips on preparing the questions and how to ask those during the FGD. It includes tips on how to transcribe and report the data.

## 3. Guidelines for Conducting a Focus Group

A 13-page document with instructions on how to prepare an FGD, conduct the FGD and deal with challenging participants, as well as how to analyze the FGD results. The tips on inviting FGD participants may be more relevant for urban settings.

## 4. Toolkit for Conducting Focus Groups

This 32-page document is quite comprehensive, covering research basics and principles such as confidentiality, the important skills of FGD facilitators that will determine success such as building rapport and listening skills. The suggestions on how to prepare for FGD are very good including how to manage challenging situations. The document also provides checklists that can be used for training of facilitators. Comprehensive tools if you would like to learn about FGD.

### Sample Exercise

When training Focus Group Discussion facilitators, it may be helpful to conduct FGD role play exercises. Annex B contains instructions for the role play.

### Conducting the Activity

1. Ensure that the voice recorder is on before the discussion starts, and ensure that it has a full battery.
2. Always ask “anything else?” when the respondent answers, before moving on to the next question.
3. Annex A contains sample questions for various topics for Focus Group Discussions, which can be chosen depending on the priority issues you want to assess based on your earlier assessment results.
4. Table 2 in Annex A may be helpful to summarize/take notes throughout the FGD.



## Annex A

**Table 1. FGD Sample Questions**

### **General Health Issues and Quality of Health Care (Questions for men and women)**

- What are the health problems for mothers in this community? Anything else?
- What are the health problems for children under 5 in this community? Anything else?
- What are the health problems for men in this community? Anything else?
- What are the health problems for adolescents in this community? Anything else?
- Do you feel comfortable to go to the health facility or to see a health worker if you are sick? Why or why not? (PROBE FOR REASONS: ARE THERE ANY FEMALE HEALTH WORKERS IN THE HEALTH FACILITY? THE QUALITY OF CARE AT THE FACILITY?)
- Do you know if any family or any groups in this community have difficulties to access health care? If so, which group of people have difficulty? (PROBE: DISABLED, ELDERLY, SINGLE PARENTS, CERTAIN ETHNICITY/RACE/CASTE, MVC HOUSEHOLDS?)
- What are or were the differences in challenges (if any) in going to the health facility during the COVID-19 pandemic? (PROBE FOR: ATTITUDES, DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUPS, INCLUDING VULNERABLE GROUPS.)

### **Child Health and Nutrition (Questions for men and women)**

- Who is responsible for taking care of children under five years old?
- Who makes decisions in the household about child health and nutrition?
- Who (which family members) participate in health and nutrition activities? Are they the same people who make the decision about child health and nutrition?
- Do mothers in this community breastfeed their baby? Why or why not?
- When do people start giving the first food to babies (at what age)? What is given? Why?
- Is there any food that children under five should avoid? What are some examples? Why?
- What will people in this community do if they have a malnourished child? Why? Anything else?
- What will parents do when their child under 5 is sick? (PROBE: DO THEY GO TO ANYONE? WHY? WHAT IS GIVEN TO THE CHILD? WHY?)
- How is the community's acceptance of child immunization? Do any families refuse? Why?
- Does the health facility distribute deworming medicines to children under 5 years? When was the last time this distribution was done? How is it distributed to the children? (PROBE FOR DISTRIBUTION TO MVCs.)
- Does the health facility distribute vitamin A to children under 5 years? When was the last time this distribution was done? How is it distributed to the children? (PROBE FOR DISTRIBUTION TO MVCs.)
- What types of services are available for children living with disability? Where can they go to access those services?
- Do the families of children living with disabilities have any difficulties in accessing services? If yes, what are the reasons? (PROBE IS IT DUE TO COSTS, ACCESSIBILITY, OR NEGATIVE NORMS ABOUT CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES, ETC.)
- In malaria endemic community: Do families use Long Lasting Insecticide Treated Nets here? Why or why not? Do children sleep under the LLIN every night? Why or why not?
- In High HIV prevalence community: Do people have access to ARVs? How about for children who are HIV positive?



## Maternal Health and Nutrition (Questions for men and women)

- In general, how many ante-natal care visits does a pregnant women go to? Are there any challenges to have one ANC visit each month?
- Do women and men follow birth spacing and delaying pregnancies? Why or why not? (PROBE: ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS). Who makes the decisions on this (women, men, both)? What are the most common methods for avoiding pregnancy? What are the challenges for birth spacing? What should be done to overcome the challenges?
- Did you receive counseling on birth spacing? Does the health center supply the birth spacing materials? What did you think of the counselling and/or the materials? (PROBE ON QUALITY AND THEIR EXPERIENCE.)
- Where do women usually deliver their babies? Why? Who usually makes the decision?
- How many times do the pregnant women in this community usually eat in a day?
- Are there any foods that pregnant women should avoid? What are the examples? Why?
- Have you ever received iron folic acid tablets or any micronutrient supplements from the health centre or a health worker? What do you think of those tablets? How often do you consume them?
- What would be the reasons that some pregnant women are not eating as much as they should? (PROBE: FINANCIAL BARRIERS, MYTHS, TABOOS, EATING LAST, ETC.)
- Do pregnant adolescents have more difficult access to HN services? What are the reasons? Is it due to costs, accessibility, or negative norms about women being pregnant out of wedlock, or very young?
- In malaria endemic communities: Do families use Long Lasting Insecticide Treated Nets (LLIN) here? Why or why not? Do pregnant women sleep under the LLIN every night? Why or why not?
- In High HIV prevalence communities: Do people have access to ARVs? How about for pregnant women who are HIV positive? Are there PMTCT services here?

## Mental Health (Questions for men and women)

- What would families in this community do if they had a family member with a mental health issue, such as depression? How would other people react?
- What are the sources of stress in pregnant women and girls? For mothers and caregivers of young children under five years? (PROBE: DIFFERENT VULNERABLE GROUPS, E.G. ADOLESCENT GIRLS, ELDER CAREGIVERS. PROBE FOR SOURCES, E.G. LACK OF FOOD, INCOME, GENDER-BASED-VIOLENCE, FAMILY ILLNESS, JOB LOSS, COVID-19, ETC. AND WHEN THEY EXPERIENCE STRESS, E.G. CONFIRMATION OF PREGNANCY, BEFORE OR AFTER DELIVERY, RETURN TO WORK).
- How do you manage your stress? (PROBE: FOR SUPPORT PERSONS, SERVICES.)
- Who provides mental health services in this community? How can people access those services? (PROBE FOR BARRIERS FOR VULNERABLE MOTHERS, E.G. EXPOSED TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, ADOLESCENT OR FIRST-TIME MOTHER, MOTHER WITH DISABILITY, VERY POOR/POOR MOTHERS, ETC.)

## Consumption of fortified products

- What kind of salt is used at the household level? Where do families get their salt? (PROBE AS NEEDED ON WHETHER OR NOT SALT IS IODISED.) IF NOT USING IODISED SALT, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS?

### **Lifestyle Practices (Questions for men and women)**

- In this community, who usually drinks alcohol? Is it common for women to also drink alcohol? How about pregnant women and girls? Is this an issue among adolescents? Why? (PROBE FOR DIFFERENT VULNERABLE GROUPS. TAKE NOTE OF ANY DEROGATORY ATTITUDES AND NAMES AND ENSURE GROUP IS INCLUSIVE.)
- What do you think are the ill effects of consuming alcohol for pregnant women?
- In this community, who smokes tobacco? (SHARE LOCAL EXAMPLES.) Is it common for women and girls? What about for pregnant women? Why? Is this an issue among adolescents? (PROBE FOR DIFFERENT VULNERABLE GROUPS. TAKE NOTE OF ANY DEROGATORY ATTITUDES AND NAMES AND ENSURE GROUP IS INCLUSIVE.)
- What do you think are the ill effects of smoking for pregnant women?
- In this community, are there people who use drugs illegally? Adults or children or both? How about women? How about pregnant women? Is this a particular issue among adolescents? (PROBE FOR DIFFERENT VULNERABLE GROUPS. TAKE NOTE OF ANY DEROGATORY ATTITUDES AND NAMES AND ENSURE GROUP IS INCLUSIVE.)
- Why do you think adults and young people use tobacco, drugs and alcohol? (PROBE FOR REASONS FROM VULNERABLE GROUPS. TAKE NOTE OF ANY DEROGATORY ATTITUDES AND NAMES AND ENSURE GROUP IS INCLUSIVE.)
- What do you think as the ill effects of using drugs?

### **ECD Situation**

- In your community, are there any traditions that can be harmful for the baby or young child? Can you give some examples?
- Who usually plays with the children 0–3 years old? Do you think that it is important to play with children at this age? Why or why not
- Are there any services in this community to help parents know about the growth and development of their children 0–3 years old? What kind of services are available? Who provides these services?
- What will families do if they have a child with a disability? Where can they go to access support or services?
- What are the services provided through the ECD centers, if any? Are you satisfied with the services provided in these centers? Do all parents send their children to these centers? (PROBE FOR BARRIERS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS.) Why?

### **WASH Practices (Questions for men and women)**

- How do people get water for drinking in this community? Is it available all year round? When is it difficult to get water?
- How do people get water to wash their clothes? Is it available all year round? When is it difficult to get water?
- How do people get water to bathe? Is it available all year round? When is it difficult to get water?
- How do people store water in the home? Do they treat the water in any way before drinking it? If so, how?
- Where do people in this community go to defecate?
- Where do young children in this community go to defecate? How do you dispose of the baby's feces? Where? (PROBE FOR ANY CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS.)
- Who makes decision in the family about building a latrine at home? Men/Women/Both? Who among you have a latrine at home?

- When do people wash hands in a day? What are some of the reasons why people do not wash their hands with soap? (Probe for reasons of different groups, including vulnerable groups, e.g. children (boys and girls), persons with disabilities (men and women), etc.)
- Do adolescent girls have the menstrual products they need?

### **Savings for Health Care (Questions for men and women)**

- Who makes decision in the family to have some savings for health care, such as for a sick child or childbirth? Men/Women/Both? Who among you have some savings for health care?

### **Faith (Questions for men and women)**

- Do the religious leaders or faith leaders (such as imams, priests, and monks) guide the parents on caring for their children? If yes, what are the messages and behaviours they recommend? Can you mention some of the practices that you have followed based on their recommendation?
- Do the faith communities support special/specific groups of children who might be more vulnerable (could be kids who are out of school, children living with a disability, young mothers etc.)
- What should be the role of the faith community in promoting child wellbeing? If no role, why not?
- What do you see as the role for faith leaders in addressing your community's local child wellbeing issues? If no role, why not?
- How do different faith communities and faith leaders work together here in this area? (for example, Muslim and Christian but also between communities within the faith group, e.g. inter-denomination)

### **Child Protection (Questions for men and women, boys and girls)**

- Are there any children in this community who are separated from their caregivers, or living without any adults (unaccompanied minors)? Is there any agency responsible for caring for them?
- What are the existing risks or dangers for children in this community related to:
  - o environment, such as animals, snakes, open pits, riversides or other water bodies, or accidents?
  - o sexual violence?
  - o work, such as child labour?
  - o violence at home, domestic abuse?
- Which children are affected the most by those different risks? Which age groups?
- How common is birth registration for children in this community? What are the difficulties or challenges to register births? What are the conditions making it easier for the families to register birth?
- How common is child marriage in this community?
- Who makes decisions about when a girl should get married? Who make decisions about when a boy should get married?
- What makes it difficult for the family to refuse marrying their girl child early?
- What makes it easy for the family to refuse marrying their girl child early?
- Who will approve the family for refusing to marry their girl child early?
- Who will disapprove the family for refusing to marry their girl child early?
- When there is a child who is abused, where can you report the case? Which agency?
- When there is a woman who is abused or who has experienced domestic violence, where can she report the case? Will she report it?

### General Adolescent Health (Questions for boys and girls)

- General Adolescent Health (Questions for boys and girls)
- What are the health problems for the adolescents in this community? Anything else?
- Do you see any health problems for the adolescent girls (your age) in this community? What? Why? Anything else?
- Do you see any health problems for the adolescent boys (your age) in this community? What? Why? Anything else?
- Has anybody/any institution ever helped adolescents to address those health problems? What? From whom? Anything else?
- Are there any activities organized by the adolescents/youths themselves to make community healthier or safer? Any examples?
- Have you participated in those activities by adolescents? Why or why not?
- What do you do when you are sick or need health services? Where do you go to seek help? Why?
- From your own experience, can adolescent or youth go and visit health facility easily? Why? (PROBE: DO YOU NEED ANY SPECIAL PERMISSION FROM FAMILY?)
- What can you suggest to the Health Workers to improve their service quality for adolescents?

### Adolescent SRH (Questions for boys and girls)

- When do girls (or boys) in this community start having intimate relationship? How old are they usually?
- Where can adolescents to get information about pregnancy?
- Where can adolescents to get information about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)?
- Where do most girls go for advice or information about preventing pregnancy? What about for STIs?
- Have you received any lessons or information about sexual health? If so, where and from whom? What information and recommendations were taught, in general?
- What makes the recommendations about sexual health difficult to follow, if anything? What can help to make them easier to follow?
- For girls: If you had a friend your age that spent time with a boy/man in private, what would you advise her to do in order to not get pregnant? Tell me more about the things a girl or woman can do to avoid becoming pregnant.
- For boys: If you had a friend your age that spent time with a girl in private, what would you advise him to do in order to not get the girl pregnant? Tell me more about the things a boy or man can do to avoid their partner becoming pregnant.
- For girls and boys: Do many girls in this community use family planning methods/ contraceptives? Why or why not? Boys? Why or why not? (PROBE FOR WHICH GROUPS OF ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS USE AND DO NOT USE FAMILY PLANNING)
- How do adolescent girls or adolescent boys talk with their partners about family planning methods/ contraceptives?
- If one of your friends (another adolescent girl) became pregnant, how do you think she would react? How would her parents react?
- If you were ever in the position that you were pregnant while still an adolescent, how would you react? If you were the boyfriend of this pregnant girl, how would you react?
- What do you think you should do, or any other pregnant adolescent girl should do?



### Adolescent Nutrition (Questions for boys and girls)

- How many times in a day do you usually eat? When (at what time)?
- What are the foods that you usually eat in a day?
- What are the foods that you think you should eat more? Why?
- What are the foods that you think you should eat less? Why?
- Who makes decision on what you eat? Who buys the food for you? Who cooks the food for you?
- Where is the best place for adolescents to get information about nutrition and healthy foods?
- What would you say the healthy foods for adolescents are?
- What makes it easy for you to eat healthy as adolescents?
- What makes it difficult for you to eat healthy as adolescents?
- Who will approve you to eat healthy?
- Who will disapprove you to eat healthy?
- Have you ever received iron folic acid tablets or any micronutrient supplements from the health centre or the health worker? What do you think of those tablets? How often do you consume them?
- Have you ever tried purchasing iron folic acid tablets or vitamins from the shop? What do you think of those vitamins? How often do you consume them?

### If older siblings take on a key role in caring for younger children in the household:

- When do older siblings help take care of younger siblings?
  - o Note: Probe for the various situations and length of time, if necessary. If it comes up as a question, children can share times with an adult (like your mother, father, grandmother, grandfather or other adult family member) and when the older sibling takes care of younger siblings on their own.
- What do you or others do when you are taking care of your younger siblings (play, cook, feed, bathe, sing, etc.)?
- Why do you help take care of younger sibling?
- What kind of instructions or rules do you have from adults for taking care of younger siblings? Do you also have rules of your own?
- What do you give your younger sibling to eat? To drink?
- Are there any foods or drink that you're not suppose to give to your younger sibling?
- What do you do if you need help with caring for your younger sibling?
- What happens in your family if your younger sibling is sick?
  - o Report back to children on the findings of the focus group discussion as a separate meeting before the community feedback session, as part of our accountability to children. The children's contribution should be mentioned in the community feedback session as well. Be sure that they can see how their ideas are being used and how it's influencing their community's programme. State the findings in a way the protects the child, particularly if you were discussing a sensitive issue.

**Table 2. Focus Group Summary Table**

Focus Group	Key Issues: What does this group identify as the key health, nutrition and holistic issues	Barriers: What are the main barriers to the practice of healthy behaviours identified by this target group?	Enablers What are the main enablers to the practice of health behaviours identified by this group?	Influencers/ Decision-Makers: Who are commonly identified as influencers?	GESI: Are there any disparities between girls, boys, women, men and adults and children with disabilities: access, participation, decision-making? If yes, what kind of disparities? In which issue or HN area?	GESI: Are there any norms or social relations or spiritual root-causes that exclude groups of children or adults based on gender or disability? If yes, what kind of norm or social relation or spiritual root-causes? In which issue or HN area?
Pregnant women/ Caregivers						
Pregnant women/ Caregivers: (Vulnerable)						
Father of children under five						
Adolescents: Female						
Adolescents: Male						
Adolescents: (Vulnerable)						
Community of Health Workers						
Other Health Staff						





## Annex B

### FGD Role Play

Inform the participants that FGDs are not simply question-and-answer sessions. The facilitator needs to present a set of carefully chosen key issues. Only conduct the FGD to further understand the context, especially if there are gaps in the information. Remember to:

- Introduce yourself and have the participants introduce themselves.
- Create a comfortable atmosphere with a joke or casual talk.
- State the topic of the conversation or use a visual aid to begin the conversation.
- Request permission to use a cassette recorder or to take notes during the discussion.
- Do not ask simple 'yes/no' question, but ask open-ended questions instead. The facilitator can use pictures, storytelling and other techniques in addition to asking questions to promote a lively discussion. The goal is for the group to discuss the issues rather than simply answering questions. Encourage all the participants to voice their ideas and opinions. Review the questions used to guide the discussion. (List them on a flip chart.)
- Discuss the following questions with the group:
  - o What are some findings from the situational analysis and PDI that we need further information on to understand the context better? (food taboos, disability services available for children or caregivers with disabilities, common childhood illnesses, seasonality and how it affects food security of households, coping strategies during food insecure time periods, health services available, attendance at GMP, etc.)
  - o Who should be the target group you should include in the FGD to discover that information? (health practitioners, traditional birth attendants, caregivers, leaders, VHC)

