

Focus Group Discussion

What is it?

A group discussion among selected individuals with specialized knowledge on a specific issue, guided by a facilitator. Although the discussion may focus on a specific topic, the group members may talk freely and spontaneously about the issue.



Focus Group Discussion, Indonesian Red Cross Society

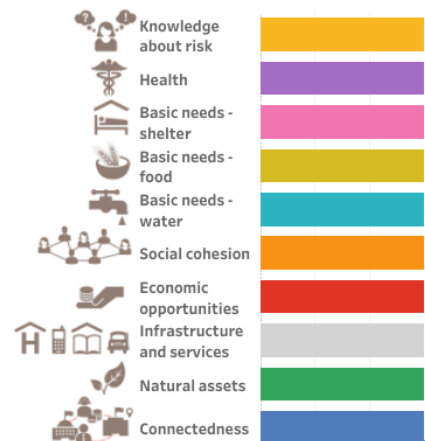


40-60 min (variable)



Paper for note-taking,
audio/video recording device.

Resilience characteristics covered:



Youth Focus Group Discussion, Ecuadorian Red Cross.

Use it to...

- **Identify** causes of and possible solutions to risk related problems in a community.
- **Understand** how specific groups of people think about different risks and ways to address them.
- **Generate** discussion on a specific topic, such as family planning needs, road safety, gender participation, disaster preparedness.
- **Gain** a deeper understanding of risk related issues.
- **Gauge** the impact of activities eg. impact of health or disaster education on people's awareness.

How to do it

Step 1. Determine the purpose of the focus group discussion:



Depending on which stage of the assessment you are in, the focus will be either on specific hazards, exposure, vulnerability or capacity or on specific solutions. Focus group discussion can also be used to explore these issues with a gender and disability lens. For example, they can give information about the biggest needs for the different groups, special challenges they may have or differences in accessing services and information between groups.

Set clear objectives beforehand, this will assist you in selecting the most appropriate questions to keep the discussion going.

Step 2. Decide who will facilitate the discussion:

Facilitators could be from the community itself or could come from outside the community. They need to be able to capture accurately the voices of participants, keep the group discussion focused on the topic, be able to manage group dynamics and mediate any discussions or conflicts that may arise.

Step 3. Decide who to include:

Identify participants based on their role in relation to the specific topic and each other. To encourage confidence and active participation take into account the following considerations:

- Make sure the selection is based on a good understanding of community dynamics to ensure that those most vulnerable are included.
- The group should not consist of more than 8-12 persons and should reflect the diversity in the community.
- Conduct sex- and age-segregated FGDs to capture the inputs from males and females from various stages of the life cycle (i.e. children, adolescents, youth, adults and the elderly). This will ensure a free space for men and women to express their opinions.
- To ensure inputs from a varied representation of community members, separate discussions can be conducted with persons with disabilities (with organisations or their families). It is recommended that people with visual and physical impairments



and family members of children with disabilities, serious mental and physical impairments can conduct FGD together. People with hearing impairments should hold a separate FGD.¹ The selection should also consider different needs between men, women and age groups.

- If the participant's family is invited, always make sure to address the person with disabilities first before their family members.
- Separate discussions can also be held with groups that face discrimination or marginalisation who may not be able to participate equally in the community meetings without some accommodating measures. One example includes communities with both citizens and migrant populations.
- Consider gathering the elders – gender-separated if appropriate and needed – of the community to have a general discussion about changes over time or integrate these questions into usual focal group discussion topics such as livelihoods or health. You could ask children or youth in the community to interview the elders – that way they learn about it at the same time. Have discussions with both male and female elders, they may hold different types of knowledge, including traditional knowledge such as weather prediction techniques.
- Children, adolescents and young adults are going to experience the most change out of anyone in the community during their lifetimes. It is important that you gather not only information from them but also ensure that they participate both in discussions about change and the chosen strategies to deal with it.



Step 4. Prepare a “question route” with 7-8 main themes you want to cover and the sub-questions that will help you gather the needed information on a topic and organise the session:



Ensure that all questions are clear and easy to understand including for illiterate, intellectually disabled, and linguistically diverse persons. For more guidance on questions on the topics of gender and diversity and climate change see [here](#).

Organise sessions during times of the day and in locations that are suitable and accessible to everyone. Take specific measures to ensure the participation of adults, adolescents, workers, elderly, persons with disabilities, etc.

Step 5. Select the recording method:

Capture the discussion either by audio-recording or by taking thorough notes. If you are going to record the discussion it is crucial you seek consent to do so from all the members of the group first. It is advised that one facilitator leads the discussion and on or two note-takers

¹ http://www.didrrn.net/main/front/files/EN_TL_Disaster_Risk_Management_2page.pdf

focus on taking notes, to record verbal and non-verbal responses and interactions in the group. Even if you are recording the session you should still take through notes as a back up!

Tip!

The facilitator's role in a focus group is to stimulate and support discussion. It is not to be an expert on the issue. The participants are the experts, and the facilitator should be able to take a back seat and encourage everyone to participate and share information.



Step 6. Encourage equal participation.

Start the FGD by explaining to the participants why the FGD is taking place and what follow up and feedback they can expect afterwards.

Discuss and agree on confidentiality in the FGD assuring the group that individual participants will not be identified in the report but that responses will be anonymised. Only the demographic of the group will be reported e.g. women FGD aged 25-55 years.

Some people tend to dominate discussions. Therefore, take steps to engage the less talkative with prompts such as 'Can we hear from someone who has not spoken yet?'

Keep the discussion flowing, focusing on the defined objectives and the guide questions. It may be necessary to guide the participants by using phrases such as: *"Interesting point, but let's stay focused on the issue, which is..."* or *"That is a valid point, but we should discuss it later during another meeting."*

Step 7. Summarize the points made

Try to wrap up the main points discussed and seek the participants agreement. It is important to capture divergent opinions within the group. Acknowledge that there are differences of opinion that all are valid and take notes on these areas of difference and ensure they are analysed.

Next steps

Cluster similar answers into information about hazard and exposure or about vulnerability and capacity into the [resilience characteristics](#) (see tables below) and identify the main similarities and differences in the points raised by the participants and identify topics that need to be further explored either through secondary sources or another tool.

Hazard	Level of exposure (elements)

Resilience characteristics	Vulnerabilities identified	Capacities identified
Knowledge about risk		
Health		
Basic needs – shelter		
Basic needs – food		
Basic needs – water		
Social cohesion		
Economic opportunities		
Infrastructure and services		
Natural assets		
Connectedness		

Constraints and pitfalls

- Language differences among participants can make this type of tool very difficult to use and should therefore be considered in the division of groups.
- Focus group discussions may not be appropriate for sensitive topics on which community members may not want to share their thoughts, feelings and opinions openly. This may include topics such as sexual behaviour, gender-based violence or stigmatized issues. In such cases, smaller group discussions or one-on-one interviews would be more appropriate.
- Please remember that this tool might not be suitable for all relevant issues; for example, it might not be good to discuss issues linked to crime in a certain area with a large group as people might be too intimidated to discuss key issues freely.