

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Focus group discussion guide for communities

Risk communication and community engagement for the new coronavirus

Purpose

The purpose of this risk communication and community engagement guide is to help you run a focus group discussion (FGD) with community members to find out the perceptions, questions, suggestions and rumours within the community about the new coronavirus. It is important the Red Cross and Red Crescent understands what people already know and think about the new coronavirus so we can adapt health messages and activities to better respond to the actual needs and beliefs in the community. This FGD will also help us better understand people's risk perceptions, health behaviours and practices that are being appropriate or could instead be increasing their risk of catching the new coronavirus.

What is a focus group discussion?

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a method for collecting qualitative data that gathers community individuals together to discuss a specific topic. Questions are open-ended, with the aim of stimulating an informal discussion with participants to understand their perceptions, beliefs, fears, questions and information needs with regards to the new coronavirus outbreak. An FGD will usually take around one hour and should include a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 12 participants. It is best practice to hold separate FGD's with men and women, and perhaps other minority groups too, if possible. This will motivate them to provide their opinion openly. If time does not allow for this, you can have a mixed one (half male and half female). Ensure you actively include vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, migrants, the elderly and consider doing separate FGDs with them.

FGD facilitator and note taker roles

There are two roles required to conduct a successful FGD: the facilitator and the notetaker. If possible, the facilitator and notetaker should be the same sex as the participants and speak their language or local dialect (if not an interpreter is needed).

The facilitator – must be someone speaking the local language with good communication skills and able to make people feel at ease. In some cases when the facilitator does not speak the local language, they can work with a translator. The facilitator needs to be able to probe further based on the responses received or rephrase questions if people do not understand them. They must also be able to keep participants on topic and to ensure that everyone has a chance to express themselves equally.

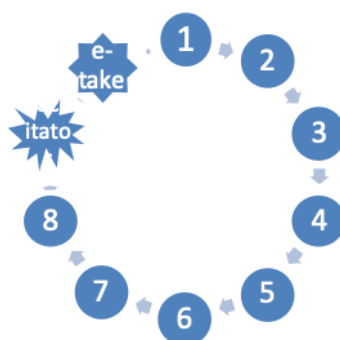
An effective facilitator should:

- ✓ Be very familiar with the FGD questionnaire and COVID-19 key messages
- ✓ Be an active listener and demonstrate empathy with participants
- ✓ Avoid leading questions, remain neutral and do not react to participants' answers in order not to bias the session
- ✓ Some of the questions are quite sensitive, ask them in a respectful manner and in line with the local culture

The notetaker – must be able to speak the local language to record the group discussion effectively. As well as recording what is said during the group discussion, the notetaker should also record the behaviour of the participants (remarkable attitudes, spontaneous reactions, interactions among the participants, etc.). The notetaker should maintain confidentiality whilst recording the discussion by using letters or numbers to identify participants instead of names. The notetaker may decide to write only brief notes during the discussion but immediately after the interview, s/he should write the notes in detail so that all important information is recorded.

An effective notetaker should:

- ✓ Have good listening and writing skills
- ✓ Be familiar with the list of questions and the topic of investigation
- ✓ Take notes in a comprehensive way but not literally
- ✓ Observe and remain impartial
- ✓ Ask, with the consent of the facilitator, a participant to repeat their answer if they do not hear it the first time.



A suggested seating arrangement for a group discussion

Before	During	After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Plan the objective, discussion guide, participant recruitment, consent, time and place ✓ Inform relevant community leaders/authorities that you are conducting the FGD ✓ Ensure the space is accessible, and private and participants feel safe ✓ Consider providing participants with water and snacks ✓ Test the questions of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Introduce each other ✓ Explain who you are, the role of the Red Cross Red Crescent, our fundamental principles and the objective and duration of the FGD ✓ Ask permission to take notes and explain that confidentiality will be maintained throughout and how you will use the collected data ✓ Explain participants that they can leave the FGD at any time if they feel uncomfortable ✓ Ensure informed consent (verbally) ✓ Explain clearly that participation in the FGD does not guarantee people will receive any kind of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ At the end, allow time for people to ask their own questions and explain again what happens with the data collected ✓ Do not make promises about what comes next or help people may receive ✓ Debrief together (facilitator, note taker and if applicable interpreter) and write up any additional information as soon as

discussion guide with a local member of the staff to make sure that they are understood.	support from the Red Cross – nor do people have to take part in order to receive aid ✓ Thank everyone for taking part.	possible so that it is not forgotten.
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Question guide for an FGD with community members on the new coronavirus

Community name: _____

Municipality/District: _____

Date: (DD/MM/YYYY) ____ / ____ / _____

Red Cross/Red Crescent Facilitators: _____

Group name/description: _____

of male participants: _____ **# of female participants:** _____

Ages represented in the group

Were vulnerable groups present (elderly, disabled etc.)? _____

Introduction and consent

General introduction:

Good morning/afternoon, my/our name is/are_____. We work for the [National Society] Red Cross/Crescent. Do you know the Red Cross/Crescent? [If no, explain – the National Society is a humanitarian organisation that helps people affected by crisis and disaster. The help we provide is always free and given based on need alone.] We are in your community to hear your opinions and views of the new coronavirus, which is also called COVID-19. We understand you may be worried about this new disease. We are here to help you understand it and make sure you know what you can do to protect yourself and others.

Do you have _____ minutes to respond to participate in this discussion?

The information provided will be used by the Red Cross/Red Crescent (and potentially other responders - Government, UN agencies, NGOs) to improve the health information and activities we carry out in response to the new coronavirus.

- Participation in these consultations is free and there is no obligation to respond, you can stop at any point.
- No personal data will be shared with others and the information provided will be analysed anonymously and used confidentially.
- Your views are valuable and important and will contribute to ensuring our services and the information we share meets your needs.

At the end of the discussion we will try to answer your own questions about the disease. Since this is a new disease, we might not be able to answer all questions, but we will try our best. Our group discussion will last around ____ minutes.

Do you have any questions? Are you willing to participate in the group?

Consent:

Do you provide consent to document, use, store and share the information provided for reporting and communication purposes?

YES NO (if NO, say thanks and let the person leave)

May I begin now?

QUESTION	ANSWER
KNOWLEDGE	
<p>What have you heard about the new coronavirus? Please list responses – including if people have not heard of it.</p>	
<p>Where and from whom did you first hear about the new coronavirus? Please list the answers.</p>	
<p>In your opinion, how can a person get the new coronavirus? Explore beliefs: spirits, not washing hands, eating specific foods, from a specific group of people, animals, touching others, coughing, sneezing, etc.)</p>	
<p>In your opinion, how is it transmitted/passed from one person to another?</p>	
<p>In your opinion, is there a group of people who are more vulnerable than others? Explore: risks to different groups e.g. children, elderly, people with underlying health conditions, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, men, women etc</p>	
<p>In your opinion, what are the signs and symptoms of the new coronavirus disease? Please list the answers.</p>	
<p>How long do people in the community think it takes for a person to show symptoms if they have the virus?</p>	

<p>What do you think will happen to someone who gets the new coronavirus? This is to understand how seriously people perceive the virus to be and if they know about the recommended measures health authorities have put in place. These measures might include: quarantine, in which individuals who have been exposed to the disease are separated from others for the duration of the disease's incubation period; isolation, in which individuals with the disease are separated from others for as long as they are infectious; and social distancing, in which individuals or large groups of people are restricted from gathering. Measures may be mandatory (governmentally required and enforced) or voluntary (not required but recommended by government or developed and implemented at the community or individual level).</p>	
<p>Have you ever heard about isolation of a suspected case? Do you know what this means and what do you think about it?</p>	
<p>Do you think there is a group/or person in or outside your community who is responsible for spreading the virus? Why do you think these people are spreading the virus in your community? This is to understand the level of stigma in the community.</p>	
<p>HEALTH-SEEKING BEHAVIORS</p>	
<p>How can we protect ourselves and our families against the new coronavirus? Explore: use of traditional healers and remedies, handwashing, cooking food thoroughly, keeping a safe distance, covering mouth with a tissue or elbow when sneezing or coughing, cleaning surfaces regularly to kill germs etc.</p>	
<p>Do people in your community wash their hands regularly? Ask if yes, why? If not, why not?</p>	

<p>If you think someone in your community has the new coronavirus, what kind of treatment should they follow? Explore: traditional healers and remedies, pharmacies/medical centers, advice from religious and community leaders, advice from government/UN/NGOs etc.</p>	
COMMUNICATION	
<p>What are the main sources of information available to you on the new coronavirus prevention and treatment? Please list the answers.</p>	
<p>What information would you like to know about the new coronavirus disease? Are there any specific groups of people who are struggling to access this information?</p>	
<p>In your opinion, what are the main questions, doubts and fears about the new coronavirus in your circle of friends or family?</p>	
<p>What is the best way for the Red Cross/Crescent to share information in your community? Explore: what languages should we use? Which channels are trusted/not trusted? How regularly should we share information?</p>	
PARTICIPATION	
<p>In your opinion, what community activities do you think are most effective for the prevention of the new coronavirus? How should the Red Cross/Crescent involve your community in planning these activities? Explore: strengths and capacities of different groups, what has worked well in the past for other outbreaks of disease? How can different groups be involved? Community meetings? Community committees? FGDs like this?</p>	
<p>If you had a question or wanted to provide feedback to the Red Cross/Crescent about the new coronavirus what would be your preferred way to do this? Face-to-face with a Red Cross staff/volunteer,</p>	

through a community representative, hotline, SMS, community meeting etc.	
Have you got any questions for us? Is there anything else that's important to know about how your community understands the disease?	

Finish

Based on the discussion, take the time to provide the group with the most up-to-date health information about the new coronavirus using the guidance from IFRC, WHO and UNICEF, which can be found at the community engagement hub ([here](#)). Provide the participants with any relevant IEC materials you have available to take back to their families. You should explain:

- What is the new coronavirus, including severity of the infection
- Symptoms of the new coronavirus
- How the new coronavirus is spread
- Healthy practices to prevent infection
- Treatment
- Address any issues around stigma.

Many thanks for your time and feedback!

Explain how participants can contact the Red Cross/Crescent if they have any more questions or feedback.