

Guide to run focus group discussions with community volunteers

Risk communication and community engagement for the new coronavirus

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Purpose

The purpose of this risk communication and community engagement guide is to help you run a focus group discussion (FGD) with community volunteers to understand the questions, rumours, suggestions and concerns they are hearing about the new coronavirus from people during their work in communities. Volunteers live and work in communities and so are a valuable source of information on the current information and beliefs circulating about the new coronavirus (also called COVID-19) in communities. This FGD is also an opportunity to brief community volunteers on key health information in relation to the new coronavirus disease and stress the important role they play in collecting feedback from communities, which can be used to improve the response. Some of the questions are quite sensitive and so should be asked carefully and in line with the local culture.

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. 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).

Who can lead a focus group discussion?

There are two roles required to conduct a successful group discussion: the facilitator and the notetaker. If possible, the facilitator and notetaker should be the same sex as the participants.

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:

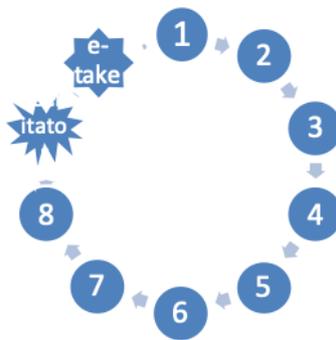
- ✓ Be very familiar with the FGD questionnaire and COVID-19 key messages
- ✓ Be an active listener and demonstrate empathy with participants
- ✓ Avoid leading questions, remain neutral and do not react to participants' answers in order not to bias the session
- ✓ Some of the questions are quite sensitive,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

The notetaker – must be able to speak and write 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, participants recruitment, time and place ✓ Inform relevant branch and volunteer leaders that you are conducting the FGD ✓ Ensure the space is accessible, and private and participants feel safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Introduce each other ✓ Explain who you are and the objective and duration of the FGD ✓ Ask permission to take notes and explain that confidentiality will be maintained throughout ✓ Thank everyone for taking part. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ At the end, allow time for volunteers to ask their own questions and explain again what happens with the data collected ✓ Debrief together (facilitator, note taker and if applicable interpreter) and write up any additional information as soon as possible so that it is not forgotten.



Question guide for an FGD with community volunteers on the new coronavirus

Local Unit name: _____

Municipality/District//commune: _____

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

Red Cross/Red Crescent Facilitators: _____

Group name/description: _____

Ages represented in the group

of male participants: _____ # of female participants: _____

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

Introduction and consent

General introduction:

Good morning/afternoon, my/our name is/are_____. Like you, we work for the [National Society] Red Cross/Crescent. We are in _____ your Local Unit to hear what people in your community are saying about the _____(fill in local term for new coronavirus disease/COVID-19). We will not collect your name and all information we write down will be anonymous. We want to use this information to plan the National Society response to the new coronavirus and make sure people receive useful information that answers their concerns, fears and rumours. As a community volunteer you know what is happening in your community. 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 agree to us taking notes, and using and sharing the information from this group anonymously?

YES NO (if NO, say thanks and terminate the interview)

Do you agree to us taking and using your photos for instance in reports or on social media?

YES NO (If NO, do not take photos of the person/s at any time)

May I begin now?

May I begin now?

QUESTION	ANSWER
KNOWLEDGE	
<p>What sort of things are people saying in your community about the new coronavirus disease? Please list responses – including if people have not heard of it.</p>	
<p>What questions are you being asked about the new coronavirus disease? Please list the answers.</p>	
<p>Where and from whom does the community get their information about the new coronavirus disease? Please list the answers.</p>	
<p>According to the community, how can a person get the new coronavirus disease? Explore beliefs: spirits, not washing hands, eating specific foods, from a specific group of people, animals, touching others, coughing, sneezing, etc.</p>	
<p>How do people think it is transmitted/passed from one person to another?</p>	
<p>In your opinion, are there groups of people who are more vulnerable than others in your community? For example, children, elderly, people who are already ill, migrants and refugees, men, women etc.</p>	
<p>According to what you have seen and heard in your community, do people know 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 people say will happen to someone who gets the new coronavirus?</p> <p>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?</p>	
<p>How would people in your community feel about isolating people who are sick?</p>	
<p>Do people in your community blame any particular group or people for spreading the virus? If yes, why do they think this?</p> <p>This is to understand the level of stigma in the community</p>	
<p>HEALTH-SEEKING BEHAVIORS</p>	
<p>What are the ways that people think they can protect themselves and their families against the new coronavirus disease?</p> <p>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?</p> <p>Ask if yes, why? If not, why not?</p>	
<p>Where do people go when they get sick?</p> <p>Explore: traditional healers and remedies, pharmacies/medical centers, advice from religious and community leaders, advice from government/UN/NGOs etc.</p>	

<p>Would people know what to do if they got cold/flu like symptoms that could be coronavirus?</p>	
<p>COMMUNICATION</p>	
<p>What are the main sources of information available on coronavirus in your community? Please list the answers.</p>	
<p>How do you share information with the community? Have you recently conducted any household visits or community meetings? Through which channels and who decides when information should be shared with communities</p>	
<p>Does everyone in the community have access to information about this new disease? Explore: who are struggling to get information- women, people living with disability, minority etc.</p>	
<p>How do you think, as Red Cross Red Crescent, we can best respond to the coronavirus?</p>	
<p>FEEDBACK</p>	
<p>What are the main rumors, questions, doubts and fears about the new coronavirus are circulating in the community?</p>	
<p>How do you get this information from the community? Explore different mechanisms used by volunteers to collect information from the community</p>	
<p>As volunteers, what do you do with the information you hear from the community? Explore: how volunteers share information among themselves, how they respond to questions, address rumors, share with the staff</p>	
<p>If the community has questions or feedback for the National Society about coronavirus, what would be the best way for this to happen? Face-to-face, through a community</p>	

representative, hotline, SMS, community meeting, community committee in charge of handling feedback, etc.	
Do you think community members know they have the right to provide feedback, where and how to do it?	
PARTICIPATION	
Is your community doing any activities to prepare for and prevent the new coronavirus disease? Please describe	
In your opinion, what community activities do you think are most effective for the prevention of coronavirus? Explore: strengths and capacities of different volunteers, what has worked well in the past for other outbreaks of disease? How they have involved different groups, how they organize their community meetings, their role in the community? FGDs like this?	
How can you involve the community in planning and running these activities?	
How do you think we can collaborate with community leaders and influencers for the prevention of the new coronavirus disease? Local leaders, leaders of local associations, religious leaders. Explore what has worked or not worked in the past	
STIGMA	
Have you seen in your community any discrimination against specific groups as a result of coronavirus?	
Have you got any questions for us?	

Finish



Based on the discussion, take the time to provide volunteers with the most up-to-date health information about the 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 including the key tips and discussion points for community workers, volunteers and networks. 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
- Existing systems used by the NS to collect and respond feedback
- Summary on what the NS is doing in general to prevent coronas virus

Many thanks for your time and feedback!