

Qualitative Guide to run Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with communities and local authorities on Early Warning Systems

1. Introduction and propose of this tool

This document provides a streamlined approach for assessing Early Warning Systems (EWS) in communities and local authorities through qualitative methods. Embedded within the broader IFRC Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment ([eVCA](#)) toolbox, this tool enables practitioners to gather insights on the relevance, effectiveness, and inclusivity of existing EWS.

This qualitative guide is structured in two parts to facilitate a rapid, participatory appraisal of EWS, focusing on their functionality, accessibility, and trustworthiness:

- A) FGD with communities:** the questionnaire engages communities to understand perceptions of their knowledge about risks, vulnerabilities, and preparedness to respond to hazards. It explores trust in early warning alerts, ensuring timely, actionable information reaches all members through preferred channels.

- B) FGD with local authorities:** the questionnaire engages local authorities to identify institutional capacities, challenges, roles and responsibilities, and opportunities for collaboration in support of early warning systems.

By integrating this assessment tool into the eVCA, the IFRC seeks to strengthen community resilience and support localized, people-centered approaches to disaster preparedness and response.

This tool can also be a standalone assessment tool for Early Warning (EW) research or studies and contextualized/changed as necessary.

2. Template information to record for FGDs:

Location: _____ Date: ___ / ___ / _____

Red Cross/Red Crescent Facilitators: _____

Group name/description: _____

of male participants: _____ # of female participants: _____

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

Was everyone able to participate in the discussion equally? Y/N

Were any community leaders present during the discussion? Y/N

Introduction:

Good morning/afternoon, my/our name is/are _____. We work for the [National Society] Red Cross/Crescent. We are here today to discuss what you and your community think about early warning systems (Explain that *an early warning system is like a "safety alert" that warns people about dangers before they happen*).

The information provided will be used by the Red Cross/Red Crescent (and potentially other responders - Government, UN agencies, NGOs) to improve the way communities can better protect themselves before a hazard impacts their communities.

- Participation in this discussion 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.

Do you have any questions?

Do you provide consent to document, use, store and share the information provided for reporting and communication purposes? (If NO, say thanks and allow them to leave)

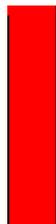
Do you provide consent to take, use, store and share your photos for reporting and communication purposes? (If NO, do not take photos of the person/s at any time)

3. Focus Group Discussion Interview Guide

A) FGD WITH COMMUNITIES

PILLAR 1: Perceptions of Risk Knowledge and Risk Management

In this section, we will explore how communities perceive their own knowledge about surrounding risks, and vulnerabilities and how prepared they are to respond to hazards



QUESTION	NOTES
1. In this community, have you ever experienced a hazardous event (e.g. floods, drought, epidemics)?	
2. How at risk do you feel from hazards?	
3. If an event such as a <i>(insert here the most mentioned hazard)</i> happened in your area, how prepared do you think you would be? Why?	
4. Who in the community has been most affected by these hazards? In what ways have they been affected?	
5. Why do you think some people do not or cannot prepare for <i>(Insert hazard)? (e.g. capacities, vulnerabilities, knowledge)</i>	
6. Are you aware of any early warning systems that exist? (If yes) Who sends alert? How do people receive the alert? <i>(Explain an early warning system is like a "safety alert" that warns people about dangers before they happen)</i>	
7. In general, do you trust those systems? Why or why not?	

PILLAR 2: Detection, Observations, Monitoring

In this section, we will explore how communities use various tools and methods to monitor, track, and access forecasts that help set thresholds for issuing timely alerts about potential risks or hazards. This includes both modern instruments and traditional or ancestral knowledge that communities rely on.

QUESTION	NOTES
8. What are the means or resources that your community uses to monitor hazardous events?	
9. Traditionally how does your community observe and monitor those events? Can you share some examples of this being done?	
10. Are there any resources needed that could help your community to better monitor hazards? <i>(e.g. better access to information about monitoring systems and forecasts)</i>	

11.	
PILLAR 3: Communication and Dissemination In this pillar, we will explore how communities perceive and trust the dissemination early warning alerts and messages. This includes how they ensure that alerts reach all members, including vulnerable individuals, in a timely manner with clear and actionable information through preferred communication channels.	
QUESTION	NOTES
12. How do you normally receive alerts before a hazard occurs? Are there any people or groups in your community that don't receive those alerts? Why? (e.g. people with no phone; internet connection, no access to radio, living in hard-to-reach areas)	
13. What sources of information do you rely on most when there's an emergency? Why? (e.g., radio, social media, community leaders, other)	
14. If you lose access to power or mobile networks, are you still able to get information about a hazard?	
Trust, Comprehension and Feedback	
15. In general, is it easy to understand the messages you receive about an approaching hazardous event? Why or why not? (i.e. alarms are issued in the local languages or dialects used by the community, easy to understand)	
16. Do you trust the alerts you receive? What about the issuer of the message? (e.g. the government authority or agency that sends the message) Why or why not?	
17. Do you or others in your community have a role in deciding how you receive alerts?	
18. Have you ever helped send an alert? Have you ever provided feedback about the alerts? If yes, can you provide an example? (i.e. feedback systems in place or willingness to provide feedback by communities)	
19. Have you ever received a false alarm or warning about something that didn't happen? How did that affect your trust in the system?	

<p>20. How would you recommend feedback on alerts and improvements be given? (E.g. directly to a government representative, by phone, email, etc.)</p>	
<p>Timeliness and Quality of Warnings:</p>	
<p>21. How much time do you usually have between receiving an alert and a hazard arriving? <i>(you can ask participants to think about the latest hazards that occurred in their community: floods, epidemics, earthquakes, etc.)</i></p>	
<p>22. Is this enough time for you to prepare and take appropriate action?</p>	
<p>Actionability</p>	
<p>23. Do the alert messages explain what to do to stay safe ? If yes, what type of advice is given?</p>	
<p>24. Do you think that after receiving an alert all people in your community act in a similar way <i>(e.g., women, elderly, children, physically disabled groups)</i>? Why or why not?</p>	
<p>25. Who in your family decides what to do to prepare for a hazard? <i>ous event (e.g. who would make the decision on whether to evacuate)?</i></p>	
<p>26. Can you give us an example of actions that have been taken by you or your community after receiving an alert? <i>(e.g. social norms/ cultural practices) If you have not received Alerts, please write "Does not apply")</i></p>	
<p>PILLAR 4: Preparedness and response capabilities In this pillar we will explore community actions to prevent risks, prepare for emergencies, and respond effectively to alerts. These efforts ensure communities can act appropriately when alerts are issued.</p>	
<p>27. What actions do you think you can take to prevent a hazard turning into a disaster? <i>(e.g. like for example rising river water, from turning into a disaster such as a flood?)</i></p>	
<p>28. Does your community have a community disaster response team? Is there a plan that outlines what the community should do when a hazard approaches?</p>	

B. FGD WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Assessment with local authorities should be completed with the actors at the local governance level, that is: municipal authorities, local risk management systems, and other key actors related to the EWS development and operation, whenever possible.

The purpose is to conduct a rapid assessment on the risks, legislation, resources, commitments, responsibilities, and active participation in the design, maintenance and management of the early warning system, from the perspective of the government actors.

PILLAR 1: Risk Knowledge and Risk Management	
In this section, we will explore the perspective of local government actors on the hazards, vulnerabilities, risks and preparedness plans.	
QUESTION	NOTES
1. Is there information available on threats or hazards, population vulnerability, and exposed elements or infrastructure at the local or municipal level?	
2. If yes, who owns this information and what type of information is it (maps, reports, databases)? Who can access it?	
3. Do you believe that the community understands the risks and impacts of climate change?	
4. Are there laws that outline national and local government mandates for the implementation and operation of early warning systems?	
5. Are risk assessments or risk analyses conducted with community engagement?	
6. Do these assessments include the population's different capacities and needs (gender, age, disability, language, literacy)?	
7. How is risk information integrated into decision making processes and what strategies exist to mitigate identified risks?	
PILLAR 2: Detection, Observations, Monitoring	

In this section, we will explore tools and methods to monitor, track, and access forecasts that help set thresholds for issuing timely alerts about potential risks or hazards.

QUESTION	NOTES
8. Which channels do you use to receive forecasts about hazards?	
9. How are hazardous events monitored in your area? Do you think all relevant hazards are covered by the monitoring system?	
10. Are there any resources needed that could help to better monitor hazards? (e.g. better linkages with weather monitoring and forecasting systems)	

PILLAR 3: Dissemination and communication of alerts
 In this pillar, we will explore how alerts are disseminated and communicated to ensure the alerts reach and are understood by communities.

QUESTION	NOTES
11. Which channels are used to share alerts with the public?	
12. How accessible are these alert systems to different demographics, including vulnerable populations?	
13. Are there alerting systems in place in case of a power outage or if the networks are down?	
14. Is there a feedback process/mechanism that allows people to provide input on the alerts and the dissemination system?	
15. Has the local government made efforts to confirm that alerts are understood and acted on by the community? Is there practical guidance for this?	
16. If yes, what factors have contributed to success? If not, what issues have arisen?	

PILLAR 4: Preparedness and Response
 In this pillar we will explore actions to prevent risks, prepare for emergencies, and respond effectively to alerts.

QUESTION	NOTES
17. From your experience, do communities respond	

18. to alert messages? (For instance, whether they have evacuated or followed established protocols.)	
19. How are preparedness plans developed and updated based on identified risks? Does the development of preparedness plans include community participation?	
20. Are the plans regularly tested and practiced by community disaster response teams, emergency institutions, and agencies, as well as by community members themselves?	
21. Are community members informed about safety and protection options to reduce risks and protect themselves, their livestock, and their property, and are they aware of the available escape routes?	
22. How do you coordinate with other agencies and stakeholders during preparedness and response phases?	
23. Are you aware of any resources in local government or other institutions and agencies that finance early warning related activities (including preparedness and DRR) locally?	
24. Do local governments or authorities have sufficient resources and operational capabilities to fulfil their early warning mandate? (e.g., 24/7 alert centre with trained staff, activation protocols)	
25. Are there pre-established funds from the local government available for the community to take anticipatory action based on forecasts?	