



An FGD conducted with front line workers of Suaahara (Good Nutrition) project in Bhotechaur, Sindhupalchowk by HERD team



Focus Group Discussion

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What is Focus Group Discussion (FGD)?

A focus group discussion involves gathering people from similar backgrounds or experiences together to discuss a specific topic of interest. It is a form of qualitative research where questions are asked about their perceptions attitudes, beliefs, opinion or ideas. In focus group discussion participants are free to talk with other group members; unlike other research methods it encourages discussions with other participants. It generally involves group interviewing in which a small group of usually 8 to 12 people. It is led by a moderator (interviewer) in a loosely structured discussion of various topics of interest.

The group's composition and the group discussion should be carefully planned to create a non-intimidating environment, so that participants feel free to talk openly and give honest opinions. Since participants are actively encouraged to not only express their own opinions, but also respond to other members and questions posed by the leader, focus groups offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion that would not be available through surveys.

Additionally, as FGDs are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time. Therefore, FGDs are a good way to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions on a topic. The course of the discussion is usually planned in advance and most moderators rely on an outline, or guide, to ensure that all topics of interest are covered.

Key Features of FGDs

- Involves organized discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic
- Particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic
- Helps in gaining insights into people's shared understanding of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation
- The role of the moderator is very significant, as good levels of group leadership and interpersonal skill are required to moderate a group successfully.

Pros and Cons of Using FGDs

The **advantages** of focus group discussion are as follows:

- Free and open discussion among the respondents results in generation of new ideas that can be very useful for decision-making.
- A focus group is not static. The moderator can bring any changes in order to better facilitate the discussion during the group discussion. This dynamism allows better results in terms of information derived by a focus group.
- Expressions other than those in verbal form such as gestures and stimulated activities can provide researcher with useful insights.

The **disadvantages** of using focus group discussion are as follows:

- Though moderator can control the discussion, the extent to which he/she can control the discussion depends on his/her experience. Inexperienced moderator may face problems in controlling some participants who try to dominate the group.
- Respondents may be reluctant to share some sensitive ideas and concerns publicly.
- Due to small sample size and heterogeneity of individuals, the findings may not be adequate to make projections or the composite picture of the situation.
- An FGD can be a very artificial set-up that influences the respondents to express and act unnaturally. The findings may be far from the actual.

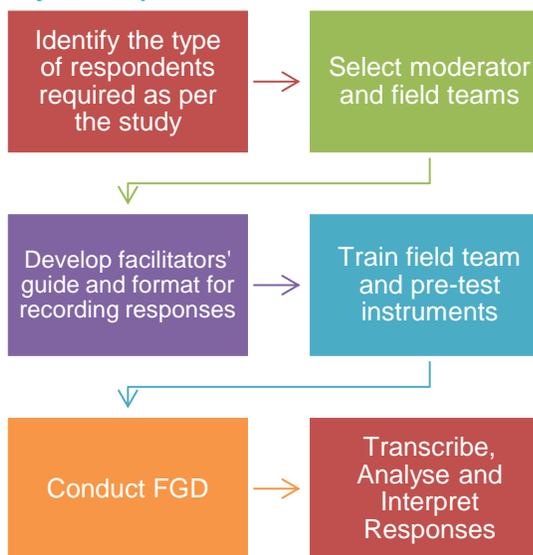
Skills Required to Conduct FGDs

Focus group discussion, like all research/study methods, it requires considerable skills, competencies and expertise such as:

- The researcher needs to be flexible and free of biasness and prejudices.
- A good understanding of the subject, problem, or topic to be investigated. This includes both theoretical knowledge and practical experience.
- Proficiency in the language in which discussions will be conducted. Focus group discussion cannot be conducted through an interpreter or by third person, no matter what types of skills he/she has.

- Facilitating and conducting a focus group interview requires considerable group process skill. It is important to know how to manage the interview so that one or two people do not dominate it, and so that those participants who tend not to be highly verbal are able to share their views.
- Training or experience in conducting group discussion. This is very important because an unskilled moderator can unknowingly inhibit the free flow of discussion and draw unjustifiable conclusions and findings.

Major steps involved in FGDs



Dos and Don'ts

Dos

- Be the naive listener or the naive observer.
 - Wear clothes that fit in with what they wear.
 - Act like the participants and you are equal.
 - Look innocent, as if you didn't know things, even if you do.
- Have all your questions planned. Your job is to simply facilitate the focus group happening. It should almost run itself once you have it on track.
 - Start with open questions.
 - The first question should be general to get people warmed up, say about participants' views about the topic.
 - If you hear of something you haven't heard of before, ask the person to tell you more about it.
 - If someone gives a general 'motherhood' answer, ask them to give you an example.
 - If someone shares an opinion, check with others in the group whether they share the view.
 - At the beginning, explain you will be confidential, that you invite them to be confidential and what will happen to the information they give you. If there will be a report, explain who it will go to and how it will be used.
 - Go around the room and get each person to answer your first question, to draw everyone in.
 - Keep praising and thanking people for their contribution. Make them feel their contribution is welcome and worthwhile.
 - Be sympathetic about the issues they raise, even if you think some are using the focus group as a bit of a whinge session.
 - Regularly ask questions of specific people, to draw people in.
 - Feel free to change the order of the questions if someone brings up something that relates to a later question.

Don'ts

- Do not ask leading questions (ones that might suggest you are looking for a particular answer).
- Do not ask 'yes or no' questions, as this does not open up discussion, though if you inadvertently do, you can follow up with 'why'?
- Do not ask double-barrelled questions. People cannot answer two questions at once.
- Do not tell people they are wrong. Do not correct them.
- Do not express any point of view.
- Generally, try not to shut people down. Welcome their contribution whatever it is.
- Never say, "We'll be talking about that later, not now."

- If someone seems really shy, do not pressurize them to speak.
- Do not be embarrassed if you don't understand something. Go ahead and ask for an explanation. Your mission is to explain the unknown, the unclear and the ambiguous.
- Never gossip about the focus groups after the study.

References

1. [Using focus groups for evaluation](#)
2. [Important skills that a group moderator should possess](#)
3. [Focus groups as qualitative research](#)
4. [Dos and don'ts of a positive focus group experience](#)
5. [Guidelines for conducting a focus group](#)
6. [Conducting focus groups](#)
7. [Preparing for focus group discussion](#)
8. [Focus group methodology: introduction and history](#)

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