

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) / April 2018

This guidance note provides a list of suggested questions you can use in Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to understand how well a programme or operation is sharing information and involving women, men, people from marginalized groups, persons with disabilities, children and elderly in decision making. Tips on how to run a successful FGD are also included at the end of the document. Please note, these questions are intended as a guide only and will need to be adapted to suit each individual context. If you have questions or comments, please contact the IFRC CEA Senior Advisor for Africa: sharon.reader@ifrc.org

To understand transparency and information sharing with communities

1. Do you know what services the Red Cross / Red Crescent provides in this village?
2. Did the Red Cross / Red Crescent explain who they are and what they are doing in this community before the project started?
3. Do you receive information from the Red Cross / Red Crescent?
 - a. What kind of information?
 - b. Do you get information about the project or operation?
 - c. Is it useful to you?
4. Do you get enough information from the Red Cross / Red Crescent?
 - a. Is it clear enough?
 - b. Is it shared regularly enough?
 - c. Do you need any other information that you don't get right now?
5. How is information shared with you? Through which channels?
 - a. Are these good channels for this community?
 - b. Do they reach all members of the community, including women, men, people from marginalized groups, persons with disabilities, children and elderly?
 - c. Is there a better way the Red Cross / Red Crescent could share information with you?
6. What did you do with the information the Red Cross / Red Crescent shared with you?
 - a. Share it with others? If so, who?
 - b. Act on it or put it into practice?
 - c. If people in the community did not use the information or act on it, why not?

To understand levels of community participation

1. Were you consulted about your needs before you received support from the Red Cross / Red Crescent?
2. How do you feel about the help you receive from the Red Cross / Red Crescent?
 - a. What kind of help was most useful?
 - b. What was not useful?
 - d. Did the right people receive help? Those who needed it most?
3. How were you treated by Red Cross / Red Crescent staff and volunteers?
 - a. Was everyone treated equally?

- b. Were people treated with respect?
4. What level of involvement do you have in Red Cross / Red Crescent activities and plans? For example;
 - a. In deciding what kind of support will be provided?
 - b. In deciding selection criteria for who receives support?
 - c. In helping to plan how activities will be delivered?
 - d. In delivering activities?
5. Were there groups in the community who couldn't participate? If so, which groups?

To find out about community feedback and complaints

1. Do you know how to make a complaint or discuss problems with the Red Cross / Red Crescent?
2. How comfortable do you feel with the different ways to make complaints to the Red Cross / Red Crescent?
 - a. Do you have suggestions for other ways the Red Cross / Red Crescent could listen to your complaints?
3. Do you feel the Red Cross / Red Crescent listens to your complaints?
4. Do you feel that your complaint was worked on or responded to?
5. What kind of response did you get to your complaint?
6. Would you feel comfortable raising a sensitive or private complaint with the Red Cross / Red Crescent? For example, in relation to corruption or abusive behavior by a Red Cross / Red Crescent staff or volunteer.

To finish...

1. Do you have any questions for us?

GUIDANCE ON FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

What is a focus group?

6 to 10 people are invited to discuss specific topics in detail. The focus group can bring together people who have something in common. They may share a particular problem or be unable to speak up at larger meetings (for example, IDPs, women, or minority groups), or are people only peripherally involved in the community, such as nomads. It is best **not** to have leaders or people in authority present is possible and instead interview them separately.

Focus group discussions should be conducted separately with men and women and try to use same-sex facilitators, especially for sensitive topics. If possible, try to conduct separate focus groups discussions with adolescent girls and adolescent boys as well

Before the focus group discussion begins, the facilitators should introduce themselves and the organization and explain the purpose of the focus group discussion. It is also important to explain how information shared will be used and that it will be kept confidential. The facilitator should also stress the importance of participants giving honest answers, and that future support and aid will not be dependent on them giving positive responses.

Why only six to twelve people? Because in a larger group:

- Speaking time will be restricted and dominant people will speak most
- The facilitator will have to play more of a controlling role
- Some members of the group will become frustrated if they cannot speak
- Participants will start talking to one other rather than to the group as a whole
- The group may stop focusing and start talking about something else

What do you need?

- An experienced facilitator: a native speaker who can lead, draw out the people who are not talking, and stop others from talking too much
- Time to prepare open-ended questions and select focus-group members
- One, sometimes two, people to note in writing what is said
- A common language
- A quiet place where the group will not be overheard or interrupted
- To sit in a circle and be comfortable
- Ground rules: everyone has a right to speak; no one has the right answer; please don't interrupt
- Permission from the group to take notes
- About one to one-and-a-half hours and some refreshments

What happens?

- The facilitator makes sure everyone has a chance to speak and that the discussion stays focused
- The note-taker writes notes
- At the end of the session, the facilitator gives a brief summing up of what has been said in case someone has something to add
- The facilitator checks that the written record has captured the main points and reflected

Which topics to discuss?

- Introduce the theme & purpose of this discussion (why do you want to hear the opinion from communities and what will happen with this information?)
- Before asking specific questions, ask about the background of the participants to understand whether they represent all community members or only a specific group (such as only male community leaders)

Rules for facilitator

- Ask open questions, such as how, what, where, why as much as possible, especially to clarify or to check understanding. Do not judge people who speak; accept what they say;
- Avoid leading statements and questions; questions should guide the discussion rather than solicit direct answers from each of the participants;
- Avoid dominating the discussion; ask simple questions and only one question at a time;
- Steer the group towards analyzing the causes of the identified issues/problems/ risks, the skills they have at their disposal to resolve them, and the role of the community in developing solutions;
- Ensure time for participants to raise their own questions and concerns;
- Ask the participants which of the issues raised they consider to be the most important.