**FACILITATOR’S GUIDE FOR FGD**

**Focus group**

A focus group is a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition and procedures. The purpose of conducting a focus group is to listen and gather information on ideas or feelings that people have about something. It helps to understand differences in perspectives between groups or people, provides a wide range of perceptions of people about an issue, product and service. Ideas emerge from the group. FGDs provide qualitative data.

Participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to topic of the focus group

The questions in a focus group are carefully predetermined and sequenced. The questions are phrased and sequenced so they are easy to understand and logical to the participant

**Characteristics of focus group**

Focus groups are typically composed of 7-12 people. Groups with fewer than 7 participants often result in a limited range of ideas and opinions being represented. Groups with larger than 10 participants may be hard to manage and record. About 8 participants would be ideal for a FGD.

**Steps in Planning Focus Groups (pre session and post session)**

**Selection of the team conducting the FGD**

Conducting focus group requires a small team, comprising of:

1. Moderator to guide the discussion

2. Note taker who will assist in recording the discussion in a digital recorder and make hand-written notes and observations, which will serve as a “back-up” in case the recording fails or is inaudible.

3. Assistant who will arrange the logistics for the meeting such as calling participants, facilitating their reaching the, arrangements at the venue, refreshments, writing on flip chart, maintaining sociogram and any other activity that requires assistance.

**Select the participants**

When recruiting for focus groups, be sure that participants fit the criteria established for inclusion in a particular focus group and the group is homogenous in terms of deliveries in hospital and home, semi urban and rural and religion.

**Decide on the time and location**

Focus groups normally last about an hour and a half, though they may be longer in some cases. A time of day that is convenient for the participants and responsive to their life circumstances will be planned. Groups should be conducted in locations that are also convenient and comfortable for participants, are quiet, and have some degree of privacy. Depending on the community, it may be necessary (and reflect a greater degree of cultural sensitivity) if the group met in a public space, such as a chaupal or school premises. The participants should be informed about the date, time and venue well in advance. Prior arrangements for snacks and refreshments should be made to facilitate smooth conduction of the FGD.

**Preparation of the FGD guide**

The discussion guide is an outline, prepared in advance for a specific set of respondents, that covers the topics and issues to be explored. The guide is designed with the overall research questions in mind and is constructed to ensure that topics covered in the FGD relate to these research objectives.

**Invitation to the participants**

Before the date of the focus group, appropriate participants should be invited to take part in a particular focus group, using established selection criteria as per the guide. It is often helpful to contact

confirmed participants the day before the FGD to remind them of the time and location and to confirm, once again, their participation. Field assistants will be responsible for this activity.

**Moderating team**

This team comprises of the moderator, note-taker and assistants moderator. The moderator is responsible for directing the discussion and keeping the conversation flowing. The assistant operates the digital recorders, handles the logistics related to the venue (light, seating arrangements, bringing participants to venue etc) and refreshments, responds to unexpected interruptions such as uninvited people walking in, managing children who accompany the participants and keeping them engaged to prevent disruption and noting points in the flipchart. The note-taker takes detailed notes and records observations during the discussions and also summarises the key findings that emerge during the discussion at the end of the FGD.

The moderator must be mentally alert and free from distractions, anxieties or pressures that limit quick thinking ability. Moderating a group discussion requires concentration and careful listening. The moderator should be completely familiar with the introduction and questioning route. He/she needs to be aware of the time that is expected to be spent on each question. Listening and thinking simultaneously is an essential skill of the moderator. It is extremely important for the moderator to respect each participant, need to be sensitive, believe that there is something to learn for each one and be open to understand their perspective. Each participant should be warmly welcomed, made to feel comfortable and at ease and moderator should show interest in their lives and what is happening in their environment. These efforts will improve quality and enrich the information collected.

**Pre-session strategy**

All arrangements need to be complete well before the discussion. A brief period of small talk for 5-10 minutes before the discussion is initiated is important to make the participants feel comfortable, relaxed and will enable them to open up and create a warm and friendly environment. This can be around neutral topics such as weather, source of entertainment, etc, unrelated to the FGD. Name tags, either name tent or badges with names written clear and big, will be placed in front of the participant or participants will be told to wear them. Addressing participants by name gives them the feeling of importance with a personal touch. However they should be told the reason for the name tags as some of them may feel inhibited or become apprehensive. It should be explained that the tags will help the study team to remember their names during discussion

**Obtain written informed consent**

As outlined in the FGD guide, obtain written informed consent from each participant. One copy of the signed consent form and information sheet will be given to the participant

**Establish rapport**

Often participants do not know what to expect from focus group discussions. It is helpful

for the moderator to outline the purpose and format of the discussion at the beginning of the

session and make the group feel at ease. Participants should be told that the discussion is informal,

everyone is expected to participate, and divergent views are welcome.

**Follow the Focus Group Guide**

The focus group guide provides a framework for the moderator to explore, probe, and ask questions. Initiating each topic with a carefully crafted question will help participants share their experiences but in a focused and meaningful manner. It is helpful to follow the focus group guide as much as possible when facilitating a focus group, to increase the credibility of the research results. If participants give incomplete or irrelevant answers, the moderator can probe for clearer responses. A few suggested techniques are:

* + *Repeat the question* – repetition gives more time to think.
  + *Pause for the answer* – a thoughtful nod or expectant look can convey that you want a full answer.
  + *Probe for an* *answer* – common probes to draw out additional answers are “would you explain further”, “can you give us an example”, “would you say more/tell us more/say more”, “is there anything else”, “please describe what you mean”, “I don’t understand” etc.
  + *Repeat the reply* – hearing it again sometimes stimulates conversation
  + *Ask when, what, where, which, and how questions* – they provoke more detailed information
  + *Use neutral comments* – “Anything else?” Do not use phrases or indicate agreement, do not nod head in a manner that indicates agreement.

One of the important aspects of focus group discussion is that it brings together people with different background characteristics. Usually there are four types of participants- the expert, the dominant talker, the shy participant and the rambler.

The self appointed **expert** **participants** are those who perceive themselves to have more experience or better informed on a topic, can create problem. The best way of handling expert is to underscore the fact that everyone is an expert and all participants have important perceptions that need to be expressed.

For **dominant talkers** are spotted in pre session small talk. They should be seated beside the moderator in order to exercise control by the use of body language or avoiding eye contact with the talker, and looking at others in the group to invite them to talk.

**Shy participants** and reflective thinkers tend to say little. The moderator should place shy participants directly across the moderator to maximise eye contact.

**Rambling participants** use lot of words and take forever to get to the point, if they have point. The moderator discontinues eye contact with the rambler after about 20-30 seconds.

**Record the discussion**

Ideally, focus group discussions will be recorded using both digital recording equipment, and

the hand-written notes of a note taker. Hand-written notes should be extensive and

accurately reflect the content of the discussion, as well as any salient observations of

non-verbal behavior, such as facial expressions, hand movements, group dynamics, etc. The

note taker should monitor tape recording equipment and may also play a key role in keeping

track of time.

**The following checklist is a quick summary of the essential components that need to be considered to conduct a FGD.**

Advance notice

* select location , dates and time that are convenient for participants
* contact participants two weeks before the session
* slightly over recruit the number of participant
* give the participant a reminder phone call prior to the session

Logistics

* arrive early
* make sure the room is satisfactory( size, comfort)
* check back ground noise so it does not interfere with audio recording
* have the name tents/tags for participants
* place digital recorder in the centre of the group.
* bring extra batteries, cords, name tents/tags , FGD guide, consent forms.
* Arrange transportation and refreshments .

**Moderator skills**

* practice introduction with referring to guide
* practice question , know the key questions
* be well rested, alert and fully present
* welcome participant
* create comfortable environment
* use probes and pauses
* manage the time
* make sure everyone has chance to share
* avoid excessive head nodding
* avoid verbal comments that signal approval
* avoid giving personal opinions

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

**Moderator**

* Keep participants focused, engaged, attentive and interested
* Monitor time and use limited time effectively
* Use prompts and probes to stimulate discussion
* Use the focus group guide effectively to ensure all topics are covered
* Politely and diplomatically enforce ground rules:
* Make sure everyone participates and at a level that is comfortable
* Limit side conversations
* Encourage one person to speak at a time
* Be prepared to explain or restate questions
* At the end of the discussion moderator provide an oral summery of the responses.

**Effective Moderator:**

* Have good listening skills
* Have good observation skills
* Have good speaking skills
* Can foster open and honest dialogue among diverse groups and individuals
* Can remain impartial (i.e., do not give her/his opinions about topics, because

this can influence what people say)

* Can encourage participation when someone is reluctant to speak up
* Can manage participants who dominate the conversation
* Are sensitive to gender and cultural issues
* Are sensitive to differences in power among and within groups

**Roles and Responsibilities of Note Takers/assistant**

Bring the following materials for the focus group:

* Consent forms
* Materials to record the focus group (paper, pens, writing board)
* Bring a flip chart as well as markers/pens of different colors for recording information (as needed) on a flip chart or dry erase board.
* Recording equipment: a digital recorder, extension cord, extra digital recorders, and extra batteries
* Assist the moderator in arranging the room (e.g., seating, flip chart stand and paper, etc.)
* Record major themes, ideas, comments and observations regarding group
* Review your notes with the focus group moderator
* Capture any new insights that emerged as a result of this discussion with the moderator
* Do not throw away any papers with notes of the focus group discussion. These will be stored with other data collected through the needs assessment.

[Need to determine who will take responsibility for these notes, as well as the consent forms].

**Effective Note Takers:**

* Have good listening skills
* Have good observation skills
* Have good writing skills
* Are able to take notes that are comprehensive but not word-for-word
* Do not participate in the discussion

**Immediately after the session**

Check with the participants to see if all the comments have been captured

Check that all the items are kept back properly like digital recorder, flip chart etc.

**Post session**

* Summary of the discussion
* Check to see all information captured
* Thank participants, ensure everybody has transportation to reach home
* Check all the items kept in bags.
* transcription

**During session**

* Welcome
* Small talk & rapport building
* Overview of the topic
* Explain ground rules
* Consenting
* Questions in sequence ( opening, introductory, transition, key ,ending, and concluding question)
* Take note throughout the discussion and digital recording
* Monitoring recording equipments

**Pre session**

* Prepare FGD Guide
* Select the team (:moderator, note taker, assistant)
* Participant selection ( quota sampling)
* Inform participants
* Logistics arrangement ( recorder, flip chart, batteries, cord, mat etc)
* Select the location, sitting arrangement, time management
* Refreshment arrangement

FGD Steps