

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Informal Focus Group Discussion

- ◇ Visiting a community. Stop by a house, chat with head of household.
- ◇ Others come and join the conversation.
- ◇ Informal GD is build upon the social networks that operates in a natural setting. Includes both kin and other neighbors. These might be the decision makers.

◆ **FGD are a more formal way of getting groups of people to discuss selected issues.**

Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

- ◇ A focus group discussion is a group discussion of 6-12 persons
- ◇ Guided by a facilitator,
- ◇ Participants talk freely and spontaneously about a certain issue.

The purpose of FGD:

- ◆ To obtain in-depth information on concepts, perceptions, and ideas of the group.
- ◆ More than a question-answer interaction.
- ◆ Group members discuss the topic among themselves.

Focus groups are:

- ◆ Formally constituted (organized in advance);
- ◆ Structured groups brought together (people from similar background, age, sex, education, religion, or similar experiences);
- ◆ 6-12 persons;
- ◆ Guided by a moderator/facilitator;

Cont.

- ◆ **To address a specific issue (talk freely, agree or disagree),**
- ◆ **Within a fixed time frame, and**
- ◆ **In accordance with clearly spelled out rules of procedure.**

How to conduct FGD?

1. Preparation

- ◇ Selection of topic, questions to be discussed (open ended).
- ◇ Selecting the study participants:
 - ◇ - Purposive or convenience sampling.
 - ◇ - Similar background. Age, sex, status.
 - ◇ - 6-12 persons in a session.
 - ◇ - Contact the participants. Invitations.
- ◇ Making physical arrangements.

2. Conducting the session:

- ◇ One of the members of the research team should act as 'facilitator' for the focus group. One should serve as 'recorder' (rapporteur).

Functions of the Facilitator/Moderator:

- ◆ Act as a coordinator, not as an expert.
- ◆ Introduce the session.
- ◆ Encourage discussion.
- ◆ Encourage involvement. Ask for clarifications; reorienting the discussion when it goes off the track; bringing in reluctant participants. Deal with dominant participant
- ◆ Build Rapport. Observe nonverbal communication.

Some guidelines for the facilitator:

- ◇ Observe verbal as well non-verbal communication. What are they saying? What does it mean to them? Empathize.
- ◇ Do not try to comment on everything that is said
- ◇ Control the timings unobtrusively.

Some guidelines for the Facilitator (Cont.)..

- ◆ **Summarize the main issues at the end of FGD.**
- ◆ **Check whether all participants agree.**
- ◆ **Thank the participants.**
- ◆ **Listen for the added comments after meeting has closed.**

Functions of the Recorder

- ◆ **Keep a record of the content as well as emotional reactions and nature of group interactions.**
- ◆ **Record the following:**
 - ◆ **- Date, time, and place.**
 - ◆ **- Names and characteristics of participants.**
 - ◆ **- Description of group dynamics (level of participation, presence of a dominant participant, level of interest).**

Functions of Recorder (Cont.)

- ◆ - Opinions of the participants, as far as possible in their own words, especially the key statements.
- ◆ - Emotional aspects (reluctance, strong feelings attached to certain opinions)
- ◆ - Vocabulary used.

Functions of Recorder (Cont.)

- ◇ **Assist the facilitator by drawing his/her attention to missed topics or missed comments from the participants.**
- ◇ **Help the facilitator resolve the conflict if necessary.**
- ◇ **Make sure a copy of the list of topics and key probe questions is available and referred to during the FGD.**

Duration of FGD

- ◇ **Between one hour to one hour and a half.**

3. Analysis of Results

- ◇ After each FGD the facilitator and recorder meet to review and evaluate the discussion.
- ◇ The full report is prepared using the participants own words, listing the key statements, ideas and attitudes.
- ◇ Additional questions are formulated if needed.
- ◇ Answers of different sub-groups are compared.
- ◇ The findings must be recorded in a coherent way.
- ◇ The most useful quotations should be selected.

4. Report Writing

- ◇ Start with a description of the selection and composition of the group and participants, and a commentary on the group process.
- ◇ Present your findings, following your list of topics and guided by the objectives of FGD.
- ◇ Include questions whenever possible, particularly the key statements.

Uses of FGDs

- ◆ Produce a lot of information far more quickly, and at less cost than individual interviews.
- ◆ Help focus research and develop relevant research hypotheses. In-depth analysis of the problem and its causes.
- ◆ Help formulate appropriate questions for more structured, large scale surveys
- ◆ FGDs are excellent for obtaining information from illiterates.
- ◆ Means to discover attitudes and opinions that might not be revealed through surveys. Help explore controversial topics.

Cont.

- ◆ Usually well accepted by the community as this form of communication already exists.
- ◆ Generate new ideas, questions (about a program)
- ◆ Supplement information on community KAP already available.
- ◆ Flexibility in discussion.
- ◆ Direct link with the population under study.
- ◆ Focus groups are good fun.

Limitations

- ◇ **Results cannot usually be used for generalization.**
- ◇ **Participants often agree with responses from fellow members (for different reasons).
Researcher to be cautious when interpreting the results.**
- ◇

Cont.

- ◆ **The moderator may influence the participants (bias).**
- ◆ **FGDs have limited value in exploring complex beliefs of individuals.**
- ◆ **FGDs can paint a picture of what is socially acceptable in a community rather than what is actually occurring or believed. (real and ideal problems)**