



FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

A focus group discussion brings together a small group of people (6-10 people) to talk about a specific topic, idea, or question. The purpose of focus groups is to collect information about an issue from a small group of people through group discussion. In WASH programs, they are useful to:

- Understand people's opinions regarding a current program, future idea, activity, service and/or technology that you want feedback about;
- Assess the relevance of your idea, potential activities, services and/or technologies;
- Gather advice and recommendations from people to improve an idea
- Explore a sensitive topic that may be more comfortable for people to speak about in a group of their peers, instead of alone

OBJECTIVE

Prepare and conduct focus groups to understand diverse needs, behaviors, motivations, and aspirations within groups of people.

WASH-HCD CONNECTION

Focus groups are a helpful way for WASH practitioners to gather insights and test ideas with several people. Focus groups are also a great way to observe group dynamics and organizational challenges within the group or the community.

TIMING

Develop Focus Group Interview Guidelines: 2-3 hours

Train Interviewers: 2 hours

Conduct Focus Groups: 30 minutes - 1 hour for each focus group

MATERIALS

- QUESTIONS LIST
- PAPER OR NOTEBOOK
- PENS OR PENCILS
- CAMERA

STEPS

1. Identify interview participants

Approximately 6-10 participants per focus group allows for good discussion. It is useful to carefully consider the composition of participants in a focus group. Communities are not homogeneous - there are always differences in relation to ethnicity and gender as well as levels of education, power, and economic status. These differences are often reflected in people's perceptions and opinions. For this reason, it is important to carefully select participants in order to obtain the views of the different people in relation to the topic of discussion.

For example, separate focus groups should be organized with women and with ethnic minorities in order to gather their viewpoints. Do not assume that some people can represent the views of other people – for example, do not assume that husbands speak for their wives or that a lead farmer speaks for all farmers in the area, but instead organize separate focus groups with a variety of people to gather different opinions.





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2. Design the interview guide

Developing an interview guide for a focus group discussion is very similar to developing a guide for an in-depth interview, which two primary differences:

- Plan for fewer questions (or a longer discussion) - because you are speaking with an entire group, you may find that several people want to answer and discuss each question that you ask, which is great! That is the point. But it also means that you cannot create a long list of questions and expect to get through all of them in one sitting.
- Questions should be focused on asking for feedback about your team's ideas and early prototypes, instead of being only focused on gathering new information.

3. Planning the focus group

Time allocation: You will need to allocate 60-90 minutes per focus group discussion. Cross check this plan with your time allowance and budget (the number of interviews will be limited by the amount of time you have available and the budget you have for the costs of fieldwork - travel, accommodation, field workers' time). Some points to consider (same as in-depth interviews):

- If you are using local interviewers, they might be helpful in contacting respondents.
- Snowballing –once you find one respondent, he/she might lead you to others.
- When you contact respondents, explain your intentions clearly to create realistic expectations.
- Ensure you have all relevant contact information of the person and agree on a time, day and place to meet.
- People often look for compensation, so you need to manage these expectations upfront.

4. Conduct the focus group discussion

- Make sure that the space that you select is set up to comfortably seat the number of people you are expecting
- Focus group participants should ideally be seated in a circle or around a table to facilitate group discussion
- Start the focus group with a clear description of the interview objectives. Clarify any potential compensation.
- Obtain informed consent from participants detailing all the ways in which information will be collected (notes, photographs, audio, video). This could be verbal or written consent.
- Conduct the focus group as per the guide
- Be sure to record which specific participant makes each comment as best as you can
- Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and that the most social or influential participants do not take over the discussion

5. Synthesize and analyze interviews

Use the TOES or storytelling tools to debrief as a team - ideally after each focus group discussion, or at the end of your day of research.

You may choose to create composite responses using analysis techniques including such as a Persona Template, Day in the Life, or Journey Mapping, all of which can be found on the HCDforWASH website.

