

Focus Group Discussion template to assess impact of Covid-19 on Livelihoods and Food Security



Image: Mauritania Red Crescent conducting training and discussions, 2021. Livelihoods Resource Centre

HELP DESK LIVELIHOODS:

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1. Introduction

This document aims to support livelihoods practitioners with tools to assess the impact of Covid-19 on people's sources of food and incomes. Tools could be applied in both rural and urban contexts. LRC has developed the following resources:

- **Tool 1:** Survey template for households
- **Tool 2:** Key informants interview template (local authorities and community leaders)
- **Tool 3:** **FGD households (female/males)**

This document focuses on Tool 3: Focus Group Discussion template.

2. Data collection tool: Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

This document proposes a template for conducting a FGD for affected households to gather primary information related to the impact of Covid-19 or other crisis/disaster on livelihoods and food security in the affected communities. It complements the household surveys conducted through Tool 1 and Key Informants Interviews conducted through Tool 2.

What is a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)? FGD is a semi-structured interview with a small number of community members. Questions are decided upon ahead of time. The questions are open-ended, with the aim of stimulating an informal discussion on given topic.

Objective: To collect information related to the livelihoods and economic opportunities for vulnerable groups after Covid-19 crisis to identify their priorities and vulnerabilities as well as to explore and identify potential interventions by the NS.

3. How to conduct Focus Group Discussions

The FGD should take about 1 hour. Ideally, conduct two in each community. It is important to invite representatives of all community groups (adult women and men, youth, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, etc.). As women and men normally have different needs and priorities depending on the context, it is recommended that FGD of women and men will be done separately. It could be one with a group of 8-12 men, and one with a group of 8-12 women; if time does not allow for 2 FGDs you can have a mixed one (50% male and 50% female).

On the other hand, it is better not to have leaders or authorities present; we could interview them separately or include them in specific FGDs.

It is recommended to print at least 4 copies of the template for each community of the following discussion questions & notes pages - a copy for each facilitator (speaker and note taker) and for each group (men and women)¹. The following guidance consists of a series of **topic questions**. Start with the topic question and use any additional guidance or instructions if necessary, to get people to give you more details. Try to avoid phrasing questions in a way that results in a simple "yes" or "no" answer from the group. The note taker may write only brief notes during the interview but immediately after the interview, she/he should write the notes in detail so that all important details are recorded.

Some advice for conducting FGDs includes:

¹ In case that the FGD participants would be only women, it is recommended that both facilitators would be women.

- We need to make sure that the time for the FGD does not interfere too badly with their daily duties to ensure full participation and engagement.
- An experienced facilitator: a native speaker who can lead, draw out the people who are not talking, and stop others from talking too much.
- Sit in a circle so everyone can see each other in a quiet place where the group will not be overheard or interrupted.
- Avoid having the facilitator and note taker sitting on chairs while everyone else is on the ground.
- Make sure to introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the FGD and what will happen with people's information. Use the guidance provided below at the start of the FGD form.
- Explain clearly that participation in the FGD does not guarantee people will receive any kind of support from the Red Cross – nor do people have to take part in order to receive aid.
- Ask permission from the group to take notes and photos.
- Try to avoid more than 12 people in the group otherwise it becomes hard to manage and people talk over one another and have side conversations.
- Don't stick rigidly to your questions and rush through them – a FGD is an open conversation, not a survey, ask new probing questions if an important relevant topic comes up. Mention it in the daily debriefing so it can be added in future discussions.
- Ensure that everyone has a chance to speak – if someone is not talking ask them their opinion or if someone is talking too much, ask what the rest of the group thinks. In FGDs there is the risk that one member will take the lead and his/her answers/reflections will be accepted by the rest of the group.
- Even though community leaders are not included in in a specific FGD, there might still be power dynamic within the group depending on status in the community, gender, etc. It might be useful for the facilitator to be aware of those to try and avoid consensus towards the person with the strongest voice.
- Some people may not feel comfortable to speak freely, it is important to identify this and remind them that everyone has the right to express their opinion. We are only looking for opinions; there is no right or wrong answers. One way to minimize this is by asking someone's personal experience about some of the questions.
- Do not judge what people say - listen openly to their views and opinions even if you disagree.
- Avoid leading statements and questions, such as 'do you agree that'. And try to avoid giving them answers or examples to choose from.
- At the end, allow time for people to ask their own questions and explain again what happens with the data collected and be careful not to make any promises or raise expectations about what comes next or the help people may receive.
- Explain again that the FGD is for assessment purposes, explain you may not come back to the community, but you will phone the community leader to let them know the outcome of the assessment. Too often communities take part in assessments and then never hear from the agency again and this affects their willingness to take part in other assessments in the future.
- If people raise issues linked to protection or sexual exploitation and abuse, let them talk as much as they want to but do not press them for details in front of the rest of the group. Speak to them

separately at the end of the FGD and ask their permission to follow up the issue and take their contact details. You may need to refer this to a Protection, Gender and Inclusion specialist or your team leader or head of delegation.

- 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 reflections.
- Thank the participants for the time and information provided.

Note: **FGD template should be adapted to the context of the intervention** (staff capacities, time, characteristics of the region, etc.), previous collected information (through secondary sources review and other tools as KII) and FGD participants' level of education. Some questions could be removed, added or modified accordingly. Try to avoid duplication and only repeat questions to be triangulated. More technical information regarding community livelihoods activity will be collected through key informants, ideally before the FGD to allow the FDG to be used for triangulation.

The questions aim at understanding:

- What livelihoods activities are typically done by vulnerable groups in the community?
- What are the main sectors that have been affected by Covid-19 in the community and what are potential new sectors?
- What are the main challenges they have (after Covid-19 crisis)?
- Is money accessible (micro finance institutions, saving groups, cooperatives..)?
- Are markets accessible?
- What support have they received after the Covid-19 crisis?
- What are their priorities?

4. FGD template for affected households

- Introduction to the team
- Introduction to the participants of the meeting
- Explain the aim of the assessment and areas of work
- Explain what we will do in this session and how long it will take
- Explain main tips for the FGD (all participants can talk)
- Explain how results will be used (confidentiality: no names will appear in the final report)

*The answers of this discussion are completely anonymous. It will take approximately 60-90 minutes. The objective of this FGD is to obtain information from **you as community members** on the **impact of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods and food security** of families to analyse and **explore responses** to cover the needs. The answer to all the questions is voluntary; if you prefer not to answer any of the questions go to the next. Continue only if you want to participate.*

Your personal data and your answers to questions will be kept confidential. No names will appear in the final report.

- Do you provide consent to document, use, store and share the information provided for reporting and communication purposes?


Yes No

(if no, say thanks and terminate the FGD)


- Do you provide consent to take, use, store and share your photos for reporting and communication purposes?²


Yes No

(If NO, do not take photos of the person/s at any time and ask if you can continue the FGD)

 1. Introduction	
1.1	Date of interview Day __ __ Month __ __ Year __ __ __ __
1.2	Interviewer's name
1.3	Organization
1.4	Position
1.5	Name of the community
1.6	Name of representative in the FGD _____


² These questions should be directed to each person individually. Therefore, only those who consent should take part, and only those that consent to photos should be included in any photos you take.

 1. Introduction		
1.7	Contact number of a representative	
1.8	Total number of participants in the FGD (include age, type of vulnerable groups)	Males _____ Females _____
1.9	Location (District, Region)	_____


 2. Livelihoods and economic opportunities for target groups. Priority needs.		
Current situation (after the Covid-19 crisis or other crisis³)		
2.1	What are your current main needs?	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable groups separately (women, men, youth, etc.).</i>
2.2	What main sectors have been affected by Covid-19 in your community? Why?	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately (women, men, youth, etc.).</i> <i>Select all that apply</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture⁴ • Livestock • Fishery • Formal paid work • Small business/IGA (trade): grocery shop/Mini-market (house, drinks, food items), Coffee shop, Clothing/Accessories shop, Electronics shop, miscellaneous items shop. • Small business/IGA (services): snack house/bar, restaurant, Transportation of people, Beauty parlor, hair salon, security, housework • Small business/IGA (technical work): maintenance of equipment, tailor/garment, construction, blacksmith, carpentry, painting, welding • Informal paid work • Other: _____


³ Include month of the start of the crisis depending on the country of intervention.

⁴ Sectors are only included as suggestion, please, adapt to the context or remove them for opened responses.

 2. Livelihoods and economic opportunities for target groups. Priority needs.		
2.3	Which sectors currently represent your main livelihoods in your community?	<p><i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately (women, men, youth, etc.).</i></p> <p><i>Select all that apply</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture⁵ • Livestock • Fishery • Formal paid work • Small business/IGA (trade): grocery shop/Mini-market (house, drinks, food items), Coffee shop, Clothing/Accessories shop, Electronics shop, miscellaneous items shop. • Small business/IGA (services): snack house/bar, restaurant, Transportation of people, Beauty parlor, hair salon, security, housework • Small business/IGA (technical work): maintenance of equipment, tailor/garment, construction, blacksmith, carpentry, painting, welding • Other: _____
2.4	What are the main challenges you are facing (skills, resources, equipment, and access to credit and savings) now (after Covid-19 crisis)?	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately</i>
2.5	What skills or trainings do you lack in order to access employment or to develop IGAs (income-generating activities)?	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately</i>
NEW SECTORS		
2.7	<p>What new opportunities for employment and self-employment do you see growing in this area (after Covid-19)? (If they are different than the ones mentioned above)</p> <p>And specifically for women? Youth?</p>	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately</i>
OTHER INFORMATION RELATED TO LIVELIHOODS		

⁵ The same as above.


 2. Livelihoods and economic opportunities for target groups. Priority needs.		
2.8	Do any cooperatives/ associations exist? Where? Are they working? Are any of you members of a cooperative? Which one? If, they are not working, why? What advantages do you have being a member?	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately</i>
2.9	What formal financial services (bank accounts, credits, etc.) are available for IGA creation in your community? Individual or collective? Are they accessible for you?	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately</i>
2.10	Are formal or informal saving groups ⁶ common in the area? Which types ? Are any of you member of a saving group? Which one? Which advantages do you have being a member? More information?	<i>Record the information for each of vulnerable group separately</i>


 3. Markets⁷		
3.1	Do you have access to the markets now (after Covid-19 crisis) ⁸ ?	<i>Select only one option</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always available • Partially/sometimes available • Not available • Don't know

⁶ A “formal” Savings Group is comprised of 15-25 self-selected individuals who save together and take small loans from those savings. They are owned, managed and operated by their members; they are, by design, financially and institutionally sustainable, and continue to operate independently after a 9-12 month training period.

⁷ Note: use the RAM in case you need to do a deeper market analysis (<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/rapid-assessment-markets-guidelines-enar>)

⁸ Record the information related to market access for each of vulnerable groups separately (women, men, youth, etc.).

 3. Markets⁷		
3.2	In case markets are not available or partially available, what are the reasons?	<p><i>Select all that apply</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markets/stores are closed • Transport limitations • Movement restrictions (e.g. Curfew) • Security concerns • Concerned about leaving the house due to the outbreak • Adult members of the households are unwell • Members of the households are in self-quarantine • Other _____
3.3	In case markets are not available or partially available, select the specific type of products that are not available	<p><i>Select all that apply⁹</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh food items (eg. Eggs, meat, and vegetables) • Basic food items (e.g. bread, rice) • Hygiene items (e.g. soap, detergent) • Medicines • Livelihoods assets (livestock, tools, seeds)
3.4	<p>Have there been any changes in the cost of food items and basic livelihoods items compared to the same period during the past years?</p> <p>Could you mention some food items or livelihoods assets which their prices have increased?</p>	<p><i>Select a single option</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prices have increased • Prices have decreased • No changes

 4. Support from stakeholders		
4.1	<p>From the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis until now, have you received any specific support from private sector, NGO/INGO or government?</p> <p>If yes: which support has been provided?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
4.2	<p>Is anybody in this community receiving social protection support from the Government or other institution? What kind of assistance do they receive? For how long?</p>	

⁹ Answers might be adapted to the local context.

4.3	<p>What priorities (in terms of livelihoods and FS only) do you currently have for your home?</p>	<p>Record the information for each of the target groups separately.</p> <p>Select only 2 options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recover your livelihoods • Change your livelihoods • Diversification of the existing livelihood • Access to Food • Cover your basic needs except food (water, clothing and shelter, sanitation, education, and healthcare) • Pay your debts • Other: _____
4.4	<p>How do you think Red Cross could support you in terms of LLH and food security?</p> <p><i>Note: make sure that we are not promising any kind of support, we are just exploring options.</i></p>	<p>Suggested interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for food and other basic needs • Support to start/restore the livelihoods (livelihood assets) of affected population • Technical assistance to start/restore livelihoods (trainings, technical advice) • Other _____
4.5	<p>In case the community was selected to receive support for food and basic needs or to restore livelihoods, would there be any preference regarding the modality/mechanism?¹⁰</p> <p><i>(Mobile money, vouchers to choose what you want to buy, cash in hand, cash through prepaid card, distribution of goods (in-kind support)?</i></p> <p>Why? Does the community have any issues around specific modalities or mechanisms?</p>	
4.6	Any other comments	

Closing

- Expression of gratitude.
- Repeat how results will be used.
- Ensure that documents requested for desk review (secondary information) are collected, or (if not directly available) agree on how these will be made available at a later stage.
- Ask for contact details for other key people you should talk to.

¹⁰ Specify whether certain modality are preferred over others for men, women, youth and the elderly as this can be very different for those different groups (literacy levels, physical access, etc.)

5. Checklist for facilitator

- ✓ Were you able to meet with men and women separately?
- ✓ If the group was mixed, did women participate in the discussion equally?
- ✓ Was the group representative of the community or hand-picked by the leader?
- ✓ Were any leaders present during the FGD?
- ✓ Did you observe any tensions during the meeting?
- ✓ Did any one person or group of people dominate the conversation?
- ✓ In what language did you conduct the FGD?
- ✓ Learning: Any recommendations of improvements for next time?

This document provides some guidance to develop focus group discussions to assess the impact of Covid-19 on Livelihoods of the vulnerable population. For further support do not hesitate to contact the LIVELIHOOD HELPDESK (covid19-livelihoods@cruzroja.es).

Livelihoods Centre site: www.livelihoodscentre.org/

Other tools for assessment and analysis, not directly focused on Covid-19 response, can be found in [*"Household Economic Security \(HES\). Technical Guidance for Assessment and Analysis"*](#).

The HES methodology provides an understanding of socio-economic profiles of households by describing how they meet their immediate essential food and other basic needs; and how they can protect and sustain their livelihoods in order to be self-sufficient and economically secure in the long term.