



TOOL 13

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION



Credit: Tahiry Honko/ Blue Ventures



TOOL 13

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

What is the **purpose** of focus group discussion?

A focus group discussion is a way to bring together several members of a group having a common interest or common identity. The purpose of a focus group is to understand in greater depth a particular topic or issue that is relevant to the project. It differs from a wider group because of the focus group's make-up that ensures that everyone participating has something relevant to contribute to the discussion.

Plan Vivo Carbon Standard (PV Climate) **requirement?**

Not a PV Climate requirement, but recommended for use at various stages throughout the project design and implementation process to understand group perceptions on a particular topic.

When to use this tool?

It can be used at various stages of project design, implementation and monitoring e.g. when designing a benefit-sharing mechanism for the project, or to understand the impacts of the project on a particular group before submission of an annual report.

Why is this tool required?

A focus group discussion is a useful tool to engage with a disadvantaged group (e.g. women, minority ethnic group, children) as they may find it less intimidating to discuss things in a closed group of known people. Discussion groups are also useful to study group norms, group meanings and group processes. Small group discussions are valuable tools to understand decision-making processes, social participation or outcomes in PV Climate projects.

Group discussions are a useful way to obtain several perspectives about a project, activity or other topic. Unlike one-to-one interviews, members in a group can build on each others' responses and come up with ideas that they may not have thought of by themselves. Group discussions are particularly beneficial for bringing together a range of people or stakeholders (i.e. staff, students, local authority, community,

local businesses). Depending on how the session is structured, a focus group can provide a good opportunity to reach a consensus on certain topics or issues.

Information collected in focus groups or small group discussions can be used to inform projects and can help facilitate further discussions with other stakeholders. Group members can be made to feel that they have made an active contribution e.g. to project design, which may not happen during larger group discussions or participatory tools. This will assist the project developer or project coordinator to more effectively integrate different groups into projects through participatory processes that respond to their specific needs and priorities.

Who should participate?

Ideally 8-10 participants and a facilitator and a note-taker. It can be useful to have separate focus groups so each one can accommodate participants of a similar social or other background.

How to use the tool?

Before starting, prepare a topic guide, which is a rough list of questions divided into sub-set categories (or themes). The purpose of this is to loosely structure the focus group discussion and to guide the groups' discussion (as naturally as possible) through the topic.

It is good practice to record the focus groups (but remember to get participants' consent if doing this), so that the discussions can be transcribed word for word. This allows for easier analysis and serves as a written record of the session. Questions for the group should be qualitative, unbiased and open.

- ☐ At the start of the focus group discussion, welcome the group and introduce yourself and your team. Check that all participants understand the confidentiality policy and risks. Cover any housekeeping notes and then begin by explaining the purpose of the Focus Group Discussion and the objective for the session (be careful not to give too much away as it could bias the responses). At this point it is generally a good idea to pause for any questions or queries that the group may have.
- ☐ Set out some basic ground rules and remind participants that:
 - you are interested in their responses and experiences.
 - they should speak one at a time (for the audio recorder and note taker). you want to hear everyone's views.
 - they should listen to each other and respect each other's views.
 - you might ask them to move on to a question or revisit a question depending on the time available.

- any views or opinions expressed during the focus group will be confidential and anonymised.

☐ Begin with an icebreaker to get participants comfortable with speaking, and establish the moderator as the leader of the group (allow approximately 10 minutes for this)

☐ During the discussion, encourage the conversation (through prompts) and allow the group to lead their own discussion. If the dynamics of the group work well you will be able to do and say less, keep listening and let the group naturally interact over the topic. In these circumstances, keep an eye on the clock and only intervene when you have heard suitable responses and would like to move on.

☐ Occasionally, the group's dynamics can be unhelpful for the stimulation of a discussion, particularly where there are breakaway conversations amongst two or more individuals or where there is tension in the group. In these circumstances there are a number of things you can do to get the group back on track:

- challenge and close down dominant characters (politely at first)
- if a participant makes persistent negative remarks, remind participants of the house rules to respect one another and of the fact that this is a safe space
- give quieter participants a chance to contribute (lookout for signs that they have something to say but avoid putting them on the spot)
- diffuse conflicts by moving the topic on (or parking an issue)
- move into a more creative mode (for example, get the group up and ask them to engage in an exercise before sitting down in different seats)
- introduce an activity to the group that requires them to work amongst themselves (this can also give the moderator a break)

☐ At the end of the focus group, summarise the important things you have learnt from the focus group and to reflect on some of the emerging issues. Remember to thank the participants for their time and participation and to let them know that you appreciate their contributions. Explain to them the next steps and share how the information from the Focus Group Discussion will be used.

☐ After the discussion, analyse and summarise the findings. The way in which findings are interpreted and presented is as important as how the findings were collected. The most common analysis then involves both the transcript of the discussions and a shorter summary of the conclusions in a simple, narrative format. Generally, you are looking for the consensus position amongst all the groups, but it may also be important to highlight outliers or areas of disagreement.

Examples of questions that can be used in a focus group discussion

The questions posed during focus groups serve as the agenda for the group discussion. A good question will stimulate good interaction among group participants. Some questions have the potential to exclude certain points of view through false assumptions or narrow, inappropriate phrasing and poorly designed questions can affect the quality of the information obtained. To adequately consider the potential engagement of women in activities, you begin with the following questions addressed to men and women which are applicable at the household, local, national, regional and global levels (adapted from FAO, 2009):

Suggested Questions for Focus Groups Discussions - for Women's Groups

Suggested area of Questioning	Comment/Explanation
1. Who does what? How? Where? When? Why? (follow on different categories like women/men, wife/husband, sister/brother)	<p>These are some work specific questions which are easy to communicate and get a response to and are good for initial rapport building with women participants. Asking simple questions may be helpful here, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is your daily routine? ● Do you often visit forests or agricultural fields? ● What work do you do there? How much time does it take? ● Who takes care of domestic responsibilities when you are outside? ● Why do you think your visits to the forests are important? <p>The facilitator should focus on understanding division of labour/ who handles what/ how work is distributed at home and fields/ how women in different roles- as mother, wife, sister, are involved in doing forest/ land/ agriculture related work, how much time they dedicate to work outside and domestic responsibilities/ and how far they are equally distributed among different family members.</p>
2. Who uses what? How? Where? When? Why?	<p>These questions focus on the question of accessibility to resources. Some questions that may be asked are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do you use resources like water, timber, wood, cow dung, stable soil, food, etc.? ● How do you collect these resources? ● Who travels to forest/ nearby water tanks to collect water, wood, etc.? ● How do you distribute these resources at home- for forestry work and domestic responsibilities? ● Who decides which resource is to be used where? <p>The facilitator should focus on understanding whether women members in a household or community have access to forestry/ agricultural resources like land, water, stable soil, wood, etc., and if so, are they able to identify any differences in resources used before and after the project is implemented. For instance, if a project involves cleaning underground water resources and harvesting as one of the objectives, the questions</p>

Suggested area of Questioning	Comment/Explanation
	<p>must be framed around women's need and access to water resources. Since most women are involved in both agricultural and domestic responsibilities, they tend to identify concerns related to water resources better than male participants. However, the last two questions above can be useful in highlighting "who exactly" decides which resource is to be used for what purpose. Distribution of resources also highlights control of resources, connected to the questions below.</p>
<p>3. Who controls what? How? Where? When? Why? (power over decision-making and control)</p>	<p>Once questions related to accessibility are undertaken, these questions may help to identify concerns related to the control of resource use. Relatable questions may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Who chooses what resources must be brought for different purposes at home? ● How are they distributed among men and women? ● Where is the major share of the resources spent? ● Who decides how to spend those resources? ● Does change in resource use have different impacts on male and female members in a household? ● Does less collection of resources have any gender implications (such that women or girl children experience less access to these resources in case of lack of supply)? <p>The facilitator should focus on understanding the power dynamics involved in collection and distribution of resources to get a better sense of who makes the major decisions about the access, control and distribution of resources. In the case of change in supply of resources, who decides how the resources may be spent should be looked upon. Additional questions may be framed around the topic to understand whether the distribution of resources has any gender implications or not.</p>
<p>4. Who knows what? How? Why? (power over information)</p>	<p>These questions are important to know to what extent women have access to information and knowledge about project development in general and resource use. The following questions can be useful to establish this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How individual accounts of environmental knowledge are constructed, become dominant, and whether it has some gender implications? ● What knowledge of environmental protection and conservation do women have and how do they use and implement it in day-to-day activities? ● How much is project-based knowledge shared and disseminated among women participants by different stakeholders? ● Do women have their own style of upgrading and working on the information provided to them by any project team related to any resource use? ● How is their knowledge and way of work different from male project participants in general?

Suggested area of Questioning	Comment/Explanation
	<p>The facilitator should focus on understanding who has access to and control of knowledge and information related to forestry, environment and conservation in general and how that knowledge is put to use. You may also wish to know whether women members have any specific ways of doing or handling environmental related work, and use specific kinds of knowledge to make better use of resources or not.</p>
<p>5. Who benefits from what? How? Where? When? Why? (benefit sharing)</p>	<p>These questions are crucial to understand not only the implementation but also the outcomes of the projects. Knowing about the benefit-sharing helps in targeting the project objectives, monitoring outcomes and final data analysis. It also helps to find out the marginalised and vulnerable who may be left out during the course of time or afterwards. The following questions may be asked according to different project type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How did a particular project intervention or policy impact you? ● Did it lead to an increase in income and/or employment opportunities? ● Who was mainly employed? (male or female participants, lower class, migrant workers, labourers?) ● What differences did you notice in the surrounding environment? Did you notice changes in water quality, soil fertility, emergence of butterflies, etc.? ● How was income from the project used within the family? ● Were you able to access health and educational benefits with increased income? <p>The facilitator should focus on examining the socio-ecological outcomes of a project to understand who is able to access the benefits of the project and in what form. For instance, if there is an increase in the income of the family, one might try to look at how the family income is shared among the members of the household and how the increased money is spent. Some indirect questions may be asked related to family expenditure on health and education to get an information on whether the money is spent equally within a household or just owned by the male head. On ecological outcomes, women members may be consulted to understand the changes in water quality (drinking or otherwise) as they are mostly involved in domestic activities concerning water resources. Other questions around the outcomes can be framed according to the project needs and requirements but opinions of socially marginalised people should be taken into consideration</p>