

SECTION 1: Overview

Purpose

The purpose of conducting focus groups is to collect information from a small group (for instance, 6 to 12 participants) in a systematic and structured format. An effective focus group is designed around a clear and specific goal. Participants interact with a facilitator who presents the participants with questions designed to yield insight into current and/or desired results in relation to a specific topic or issue.

Focus Groups for Evaluation Purposes

Attaining the information required to complete a needs assessment will oftentimes require that you interview a number of people at the same time. The focus is an opportunity to gain valuable information related both to current results as well as desired results at each level of the program/project results chain. While focus groups can also be used to identify alternative activities to improve performance, during the needs assessment it is important to maintain attention on the collection of information that will help you identify valid needs (i.e., gaps between current and desired results), evidence to support the validation of those needs, and information that will allow you to prioritize needs prior to selecting a course of action for addressing the high-priority needs.

Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES

- Through a focus group format you can "interview" multiple people at one time.
- Focus group discussions allow members of the focus group to build on each other's comments and reactions. This can yield synergy of discussion around topics or themes.
- With a focus group you can help groups of people come to consensus and make challenging decisions (such as, prioritizing needs).

DISADVANTAGES

- Group members may not contribute equally to the discussion in a focus group format. More reserved members may not feel comfortable inserting their contributions in the discussion. Other participants may try to dominate discussions.
- Gaining consensus from the group can be challenging.
- Discussions may take too long to cover all of the relevant topics and to offer everyone a chance to participate.
- Because of the presence of others, participants may not feel comfortable sharing more sensitive information or views.
- Focus groups can easily get "off task" if the facilitator does not maintain structure and control throughout the process.

Informed Consent of Participants

Confidentiality is one of the most critical principals of research ethics. Participants of research projects share valuable and sometimes sensitive information with the researcher. By participating in the focus group discussion, participants are demonstrating that they trust the researcher will protect their identity and that any information shared during the focus group will be used only for the purposes of the evaluation. Consent forms for all participants should be completed in advance by all people who will participate. Below is a summary of the information in the consent form that focus group organizers and facilitators should use to make sure participants understand the information in the consent form.

Facilitator should read the following section to all participants before the session:

Thank you for agreeing to participate. We are very interested to hear your valuable opinion about how The Hunger Project (THP) can improve programs and better work in partnership with village members to establish a community where every woman, man and child leads a healthy, fulfilling life of self-reliance and dignity.

- *The purpose of this study is to learn what changes have occurred in your families and communities as a result of The Hunger Project programs and activities. We hope to learn things from you that community leaders and The Hunger Project staff can use to improve living conditions and other factors that impact your lives in the areas of health, education, agriculture and food security, and water & sanitation.*
- *Please feel free to be open and honest in your responses. All information you give us is completely confidential, and we will not associate your name with anything you say during the focus group.*
- *We will be recording the focus group discussion so that we can make sure to accurately capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas we hear from the group. No names will be attached to the focus groups and the tapes will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed.*
- *You may refuse to answer any question or leave the study at any time [although participants who leave the session cannot join again later].*
- *We understand how important it is that this information is kept private and confidential. We also ask that as participants you also respect each other's confidentiality.*
- *If you have any questions now or after you have completed the questionnaire, you can always contact a study team member like me, or you can call The Hunger Project staff whose names and phone numbers are on the consent form.*

NOTE: After reading or explaining the section above, the facilitator should then hand out the consent forms. There will be two copies, please allow participants to keep one copy and the other should be returned to a THP M&E staff member. If there are people in the room who are not participating in the focus group, now is the time you should ask them to leave (try to ensure a private location for the participants to hold the discussion).

Materials and supplies for focus groups

- Sign-in sheet (signed by everyone in the room – participants, staff, facilitators, observers)
- Consent forms (one copy for participants, one copy for THP staff)
- Markers and name tags
- Pads & pencils for each participant
- 1-2 recording devices (iPod Touch and video camera if available)
- Notebook for note-taking
- Refreshments

SECTION 2: Facilitation Notes for Managing the Focus Group

1. Welcome and Introduction

Introduce yourself, the note takers, and anyone else who will be in the room during the discussion.

Review the following:

- What does THP do and why we are conducting this focus group discussion
- What will be done with the information gathered today

2. Explanation of the process

Ask the group if anyone has participated in a focus group before. Explain that focus groups are being used often in community development research and that including their voices in the evaluation process is important to THP.

About focus groups

- We learn about what changes are happening in the community (both positive and negative)
- We are not trying to achieve consensus (everyone does not have to agree), we are simply gathering information about your opinions
- For this evaluation we are doing household surveys, questionnaires and focus group discussions. Surveys are good tool for evaluations, but we can get more in-depth information from focus groups. This helps us to explore topics in more detail than we can do in a written survey.

Logistics

- Focus group will last about 90 minutes (1 ½ hours)
- Feel free to move around and help yourself to refreshments
- Where is the bathroom? Exit?

3. Gather Demographic Data

Have the note taker begin to fill out the demographic sheet by asking a few quick demographic questions of each participant (age, gender, marriage status, number of children, education, level of participation in THP programs). See the worksheet on page

4. Ground Rules

Ask the group to suggest some ground rules. After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.

- Everyone should participate
- Listen when someone else is talking
- Please don't have side conversations
- Have fun

5. Turn on Tape Recorder

6. Ask the group if there are any questions before we get started, and address those questions.

7. Introductions

- Go around the circle: Name, profession or role (farmer, homemaker, teacher, etc.); where you were born; something you hope to learn today.

SECTION 3: Demographic Data

Instructions: Please fill in the chart below with the required demographic information about each participant. Use the notes section at the bottom of this page to capture any additional information.

Participant (first name)	Gender (female, male)	Age (years)	Marital Status (Single, divorced, widowed)	Number of Children (0 if none)	Profession or Role (farmer, teacher, home- maker, shop owner, student, etc.)	Participated in THP Household Survey (yes/no)	Involvement with THP Programs					
							Animator (yes/no)	Committee Member (yes/no)	Received Loan (yes/no)	Visited Epicenter Health Clinic (yes/no)	Received Training (no/yes) →	If yes, name type of training(s) here
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												

[Notes] Use this section to take additional notes about participants or make general observations about the group.

SECTION 4: Focus Group Questions

Now the Focus Group Discussion begins, make sure to give people enough time to think about the questions before answering and don't move too quickly. Use probing questions to ensure you are clearly identifying key issues. Feel free to move on to the next question if you begin to hear repetitive information.

These questions are broken-up into 8 sections that cover all of The Hunger Project's main program areas. Pose each question to the group and allow 2-5 minutes of discussion for each question. Ensure that all participants are given the opportunity to share their opinions.

ENTER START TIME: _____

Community Mobilization

1. What are the human rights that you value most?
 - a) What are the main human rights issues/problems affecting your own villages?
 - b) What recourses can you take if your rights are violated?
2. How effective are community leaders at addressing the needs of the community?
3. In what ways are villages working together to solve common problems?
 - a) Has the level of collaboration between villages and village leaders increased, decreased or stayed the same since The Hunger Project began working here?

Gender Equality

4. To what extent to boys and girls (children) share household chores and responsibilities?
5. To what extent to men and women share the responsibility of making decisions about the household (financial, health, education, etc.)?
 - a) Has the dynamics of partnership in household decision making among men and women increased, decreased or stayed the same since The Hunger Project began working here?

ENTER TIME: _____

Agriculture and Food Security

6. Do most families have enough to eat? If not, what circumstances make it difficult for families to provide enough nutritional food for all household members?
7. Have agricultural yields increased, decreased or stayed about the same over the past year? What are some reasons for this change?

Literacy and Education

8. What is your perception about the quality of education available in your village or area?
9. What barriers prevent both girls and boys from completing both primary and secondary school?

Health and Nutrition

10. What are the main health problems facing your village?
11. How would you rate the *availability* and *quality* of health services provided by the Epicenter Health Clinic? What could be done to improve the services provided?

ENTER TIME: _____

Livelihoods & Microfinance

12. In general, how have families in your village been able to increase their access to resources (financial, educational, technical support)?

Water, Sanitation, and Environment

13. What are some of the major threats to maintaining a quality environment (i.e. air, water, soil, vegetation)? What actions are people in your villages taking to address these concerns?
14. What percentage of households in your village have access to clean water? Has this increased, decreased or stayed the same since The Hunger Project began working here?
15. What percentage of households in your village have access to basic sanitation (latrines)? Has this increased, decreased or stayed the same since The Hunger Project began working here?

ENTER FINISH TIME: _____

That concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us. We hope that you have found this session as helpful and as educational as we have. If you have additional information that you did not get to say in the focus group, please feel free to speak with the facilitator or a staff member and we may schedule an interview with you at a later date to follow-up on these issues.