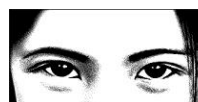©Tdh/Angélique Bühlmann- Lebanon

Using FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS with children and adolescents

A practical guide for maximising their effectiveness

Terre des hommes
Helping children worldwide.

Contents

Introduction: Why this technical guidance?

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are carried out widely in both humanitarian and development work in order to seek the views of children. They are a recognised **model for obtaining detailed, qualitive information**. In addition to getting information that is useful to organisations for programming (and research), FGDs are a concrete **way to promote the right of children to participation,** in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (Article 12).

'Often, we know little of how children shape their own values, personal histories and future aspirations, their dissatisfactions with, and expectations of their childhoods over time'

(Gibson, 2017)

However, practical experience tells us that often FGDs are not well used, and as a result their impact on our understanding about the situation for children is limited. This is both a missed opportunity and a waste of time and resources. Worse still, sometimes the inappropriate use of FGDs can cause harm to children.

There are many reasons why FGDs fail to meet our expectations. For example, if we use FGDs inappropriately (e.g. when they are not required), we experience challenges with logistics which cannot be overcome, or we make poor choices regarding the format and facilitation.

Staff in country teams and programmes may find themselves involved with FGDs in a number of ways: this may be limited, such as identifying participants, or be more comprehensive, for example designing the questions, facilitating the sessions and analysing the information. Staff may also be required to support others, from inside and outside Tdh - such as advisers and consultants - who are using FGDs. This normally means undertaking logistical arrangements, getting consent from parents/caregivers, and organising for, or providing, translation.

This guide has been developed to support country / programme teams through the entire process of using FGDs: from deciding whether they are appropriate, through to analysing the information obtained. This includes **exploring some of the issues that need to be considered, and practical tips and tools to maximise the effectiveness of using FGDs with children**. Additionally, links are provided to other sources of information to further develop understanding and expand knowledge regarding FGDs.

The information in this guide has been put together **from practical experience** (i.e. personal practice, FGD protocols and practices observed in the field, and discussions with M&E fora[1]) and a **review of resources** about research with children (see Resources section of this guide for details). It **is not about child-led research, or engaging children as co-researchers**. These are different empowerment processes and for more insight on these topics, additional literature should be consulted[2].

Although the guide is focussed on the use of FGDs with children, it also contains information and tips that can help improve the way FGDs are conducted with parents, community members, and other stakeholders.

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[1] Such as Pelican https://dgroups.org/groups/pelican , and The American Evaluation Association (AEA) https://www.eval.org/
2 For example, see Boyden, J., Ennew, (1997), *Children in Focus – a manual for participatory research with Children*, StC Sweden, Stockholm (available here); O'Neill, K., (2012*) Save the Children Evaluation handbook* (available here); UNHCR (2012), *Listen and learn, Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents* (available here); Save the Children Norway (2008*) A Kit of Tools for Participatory Research and Evaluation with Children, Young People and Adult* (available here).

What are FGDs, and when should they be used?

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a **qualitative data collection technique** that has been widely used in research across disciplines. In development and humanitarian work, they are often one of the main data collection techniques for needs assessments, situation analysis, and Monitoring and Evaluation.

Using FGDs can enable us to:

- Explore in depth **people's experience, points of view and perspectives** - in other words their personal experiences;
- Identify **shared norms, common knowledge, shared beliefs and divergences** of points of views;
- Gain **concrete facts about a situation** from a group of key informants who have rich knowledge about a topic. This can be something as 'simple' as what life is like for them, or their opinions on how services are provided.

However, **Focus Group Discussions with children should not be used in every situation**, just because we think it is good to include children or belief that this is the only way that they can be included. There are other ways that children's voices can be heard, such as surveys and interviews. FGDs are a **specific method**, so just like we consider carefully what our interventions, approaches and actions are in programmes, so we should also carefully assess whether it is appropriate to use FGDs.

Table 1: Understanding FGDs

FGDs are:	FGDs are not:
- Semi-structured discussions **organised in a** formal and structured **manner;** **A technique that** combines interview and observation; **A way to bring together a** small number **of participants with knowledge of or concerned by the issue who** interact with each other in an in-depth discussion; - Managed by **a** facilitator **and an** observer**;** **Structured by an** interview guide **that lays out the interview initiation procedure (initial** guidance/warm-up questions / activities**) and** themes **to cover;** **A way to obtain multiple opinions. The** interactions **create the substance. People are allowed to agree or disagree with each other.** The objective of a FGD is not to seek consensus but to explore as many different opinions as exist **and generate rich data from the interaction.**	**Community group meetings / discussions** which are gatherings of people who meet either for a specific decision making reason, and who are invited to share their opinion on a given issue. Even though questions may be asked, their aim is usually to get consensus on the main or most important answers applicable to most people rather than to capture as many answers as possible. They can also be used to give information on a certain topic or provide feedback to the community; **Individual interviews** conducted with a group to gain time (serial interview); **Informal discussions with people;** **A meeting or a workshop;** **A discussion or consultation with a large group.**

Using FGDs in both development and humanitarian settings **can pose challenges due to the very nature of our work and the contexts in which we work.** For example, the **issues** we are addressing (which may be sensitive), **logistical problems** largely as a result of time, **pressure to get answers quickly** to orient the response / steer projects (particularly in an emergency), or insufficient time allowed for monitoring and evaluation can all be real barriers to the effective use of FGDs. Often, staff struggle

to find a **balance between the pressure for reliable evidence, operational needs, and constraints, and ethical issues** such as the specific techniques and safeguards that must be considered when conducting FGDs with children.

Before starting to organise and plan for FGDs, we should decide if Focus Group Discussions are appropriate. Focus Group Discussions are very powerful way to explore people's opinions, meanings and interactions but only if they are well thought out, prepared for and conducted properly. They may not be the right choice depending on the context, the thematic issue to being worked on, the type of information wanted, and the purpose for collecting data.

When children are living in difficult circumstances, such as armed conflict, severe poverty, famine, they are more at risk and less safe. In such situations, we must be extremely sensitive and question whether it is appropriate to involve children[3]. It is critically important that the primary factor in deciding children's participation is the best interests of the individual child.

Another important issue to consider is that there is no point holding FGDs if the rich information they provide is not analysed and used. Indeed, from experience, this is often feedback from participants: **they are repeatedly asked what they think, feel, and want, but nothing changes.**

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[3] Horizons Population Council. IMPACT Family Health International. (2005). Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings. Guidelines and Resources, p.73.

Table 2: When to use FGDs

FGDs can be used…	FGDs should not be used…
✓ **In exploratory work** during situation analysis to understand how a problem is perceived and explained, and what solutions are envisaged by people.	✗ When we do not have **the time to properly prepare or sufficient flexibility in terms of resources.**
✓ To get **feedback** on **quality and use** of services delivered and satisfaction of beneficiaries / stakeholders.	✗ When we do not have **the time or capacity to analyse and use** the information.
✓ To be better understand the **types of change produced** by an intervention from the perspective of the children.	✗ When we are more interested in **understanding the main problems** so that we can **act quickly** rather than understand the full range of problems, root causes and concerns (because we know we will not be able to address them all).
✓ When **the target group shares enough commonality** to get a discussion going and it is possible to gather them together, and if our objective is to explore broader social norms.	✗ When we want to **probe individual experience** in detail.
	✗ If we want to talk to people having **very different perspective** on a topic.
✓ When we want to **triangulate** with a survey's results, so as to better understand the how and the why certain trends have been observed in a survey.	✗ When **logistical issues** (e.g. access) and lack of connections within the community may jeopardise our capacity to gather participants in a purposeful and safe way (e.g. when participants are far away from each other and traveling is not feasible or there are security concerns).
✓ To **develop other data collection instruments**: e.g. An FGD can be a great way to design the range of options that will be included for closed-ended questions in a community group survey.	✗ When **social and cultural reasons mean we cannot limit the number** of people involved, or **children cannot be involved without being accompanied** by an adult such as their parents.
✓ When we would like to listen to what children have to say and get rich information about their **feelings**, **opinions, ideas, interpretations**, range of opinions, **inconsistencies** and **variations** that exist in a particular community in terms of **beliefs,** and their **experiences** and **practices.**	✗ When **confidentiality and privacy** are not guaranteed. For example, if conditions are not present to ensure a safe space for trust and open dialogue (e.g. working children in their working place, or in a crowded camp).
	✗ For **sensitive or taboo** topics (e.g. sexual violence), depending on context[4].
	✗ If we do not speak (well enough) the **local language**, or appropriate translation is not available.
	✗ When our purpose is to reach **statistical relevance and extrapolate findings**. FGDs are aimed at gathering qualitative data and not for drawing statistically relevant conclusions.
	✗ When talking could put children or their parents at **risk** (e.g. repression, censorship).
	✗ If we are not used to **communicating with children** or have little experience in moderation techniques with children.
	✗ When sensitive issues may be raised but **ongoing support** (external or internal) **cannot be identified.**

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[4] An alternative would be to use Key Informant Interviews (KII). If it is planned to organise FGDs on a potentially sensitive topic, precautions must be taken to avoid causing harm. This would involve highly experienced professionals (i.e. psycholgists and social workers) knowledgeable of local culture and ensuring that MHPSS and protection services can be relieved upon in case a protection case is disclosed.

Community Group discussions and meetings – from a protection perspective

Community discussions and meetings are usually open to all, with no limited set on attendance, although sometimes these are directed at particular groups such as adolescents or women. Although community group discussions and meetings often include a set of questions, they require less preparatory work, facilitation and content analysis.

Especially in an emergency, when time is lacking to plan and run Focus Group Discussions, community group discussions and meetings are one of the best options to capture main issues, while still giving voice to affected people. They can give us insight on how participants view the situation to enable us to understand how the crisis is affecting the community, from the perspectives of its members.

It is always interesting to observe who is present and who is absent, who speaks and who does not speak, and how people position themselves in the space. This information can be very useful for identifying marginalised or harder-to-reach groups within the community. Further consultations should take place with those individuals are groups, and existing strategies should be adapted to meet their specific needs and capacities.

To learn more about how to plan and organise community group discussions and meetings, see Acaps, Good enough Guide.

Providing it is appropriate to use Focus Group Discussions, the use of FGDs can contribute significantly to the quality of Programme/Project Cycle Management because of the richness of the information they can provide.

Some ways in which FGDs can be used practically throughout project cycle management (situation analysis, monitoring, evaluation) are contained in the Table 3[5].

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[5] Adapted from Skodval, M., and Cornish, F. (2015).

Table 3 Use of FGD in the Project cycle

Situation analysis & baselines	Monitoring	Evaluation
To understand issues in a context – for example: local needs, concerns, beliefs, attitudes and practices, perspectives on the futures, and local dynamics.	To get feedback from project stakeholders (including beneficiaries) – for example on project quality, and their perceptions on strengths and weaknesses of an intervention.	To understand how people experienced an intervention. For example, what is the broader impact on their community and their lives. FGDs can also identify what worked and what did not work, and capture lessons learned from experience.
Can help in designing a Theory of Change or a project by examining how people would see positive changes in their lives and how those changes could materialise.	Can be used to follow up on contextual indicators, and to identify unintended consequences, barriers to implementation and change, and strategies for overcoming these.	
Caution: FGD with children are generally not encouraged in the early stages of an emergency. This is because "*in most cases it is unlikely that trained staff is available to conduct such highly sensitive interviews. Inexperienced assessors may unintentionally put children in harm's way*"[6].	**Caution:** FGDs give insight into what people say/think, but not necessarily what they actually do. It is important to triangulate this with observation and other techniques (or verify through other FGDs). For example, parents may say that they have learnt not to use physical punishment because of a parenting programme, but children may say that they are still beaten as a punishment.	**Caution:** Due to the high risk of social desirability bias (i.e. people trying to give the 'right answer'), FGDs alone are not the best method to assess outcomes of project interventions. FGDs may be good to assess perceptions but not the actual impact.

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[6] Global Protection Cluster (2012). Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit (available [here](#))

Preparing for Focus Group Discussions

It can be interesting for children and youth to take part in FGDs, and children – depending on their age - may prefer this to one-to-one discussion with an adult as they may feel more comfortable discussing with their peers present. However, children may also feel constrained by the format of the Focus Group Discussion. **Even though FGDs are a 'formal' process, their format should not be 'too formal', intimidating, and adult-controlled**[7].

In certain contexts, children **may not be used to being asked about their views, or previously being consulted may have turned out to be a negative experience.** This will affect their participation. It may be necessary to carry out preparatory work, such as helping children to develop self-confidence or raising their awareness on rights or specific issues before FGDs can be conducted. For example, if we want to talk to children about a particular type of abuse, we may first need to explore with children what we mean by certain terms.

How many FGDs are needed?

In qualitative data collection the reliability of data is not linked with the numbers of people who participate. Instead it is linked to the concept of '**saturation**', which means that the point when no new ideas are emerging from the participants. It is a complex concept, but saturation at 4 to 12 FGD per 'type' of participant is generally well accepted.

It important to plan the right number of FGDs, too many jeopardises the analysis work as there will be too much information to process. More is not always better – remember the number of FGD is not a factor of success. **Quality is more important than quantity.**

Caution: making sure we are not excluding certain groups

While we are not looking for statistically measurable data, we still want the groups to be generally representative of the demographics in our catchment area. FGDs cannot be too diverse in terms of participants because then experiences will vary too much. We will have to balance carefully the need to have FGDs segregated by sex and age by default, with additional FGDs with other population groups (e.g. disabilities) or with combined/mixed groups conducted depending on the context with the time and resources available.

Where it can be assumed or there is evidence of discriminatory practices or strong power dynamics between groups of population (e.g. religious, ethnic groups, displacement status, socio economic group, location…), it might be necessary to organise separate FGD by population in order to allow the group members to speak freely (IFRC, 2018).

Consider Gender, age and other diversity criteria to plan minimum number of focus groups: see diagram below.

Put simply, the more effort and time invested in the planning and preparing for FGDs, the better quality the information we will obtain. This is often why FGDs seem to 'fail', because not enough time is spent in preparation and they are pulled together hastily or at the last minute just before the session is supposed to start. **Appendix 4 "quality checklist for FGDs" highlights all important steps / elements to be observed in order to conduct a quality Focus Group Discussion**.

We must adapt the process according to the context, always having the **best interest** of the child in mind. It is fundamental to remain ethically focused, especially in situations where we work with children and adolescents that are unaccompanied, without a parent or a caregiver, in detention, or those who are not protected by an effective legal system (e.g. because they are on the move, have a refugee status, or are socially marginalised).

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[7] UNHCR (2012), Listen and learn, Participatory assessment with children and adolescents (see here)
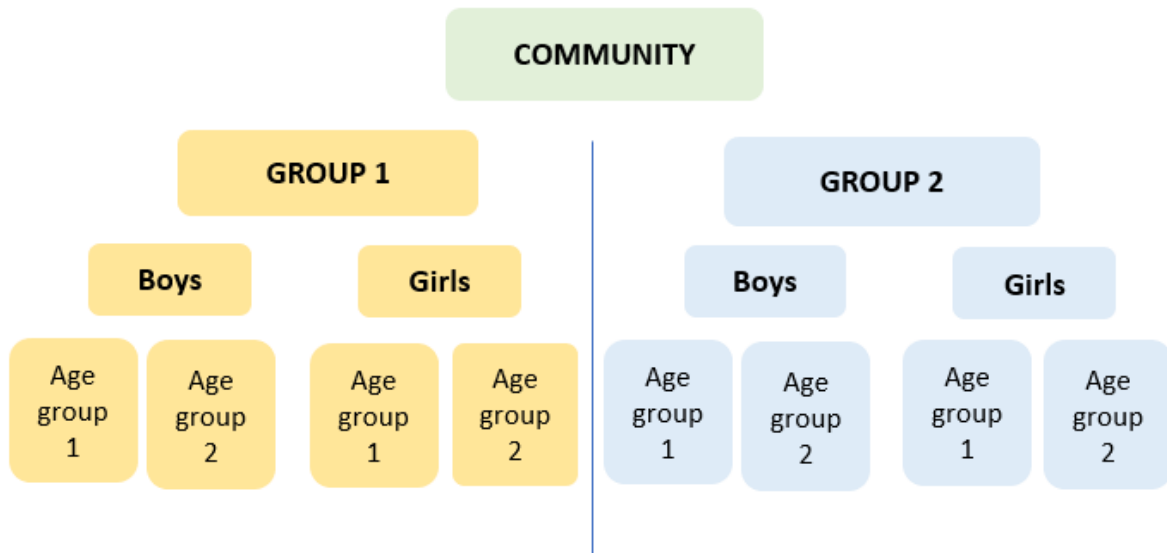
Adapted from: IRC, Basic Gender Analysis. Gender Specific Focus Group Discussion Guide, 2018.

Remember: Ethical principles for involving children in FGD (see Appendix 3)

1) **Participation is safe**
2) **Participation is voluntary**
3) **Children are informed about the purpose of their participation in FGDs.**
4) **The use of FGDs with children is meaningful and necessary.**
5) Participation is **Inclusive and non-discriminatory.**
6) Participation is **developmentally appropriate, gender sensitive and culturally relevant.**
7) Participation is ensured by **professionals having the required competencies.**
8) In all situations the **best of interest of children** is the paramount consideration

Adapted from Tdh (2018),Child Protection Good Practice Framework

Logistical and practical considerations

After deciding that Focus Group Discussions are appropriate it is tempting to start designing the questions and developing any other tools we plan to use. However, it is often easier to first consider the logistical and practical issues that need to be addressed[8] as this will help ensure that the tools (questions, exercises etc.) are relevant. Additionally, if the logistical and practical considerations cannot be addressed, it may be judged that it is not feasible to hold FGDs.

*Remember: when conducting any type of consultation with children, a "**risk assessment must be undertaken to identify any potential dangers and a plan put in place to minimise these risks…..** If the assessment concludes that there are too many risks that cannot be reduced to an accept able level then the activity should not proceed".*

Tdh Child Safeguarding Policy

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[8] AEA and Pelican forum, De Leeuw, (2011); Morgan, M., Gibbs, S., Maxwell, K., Britten, N. (2002) ; Gibson, J.(2012), Gibson, J. (2007), Skodval, Cornish (2015)

Table 4: Considerations and Tips

Issue	
Safety & security	• **Safety and security** must be the primary consideration. This includes the **physical and emotional safety** for children. • Children should **feel free to participate and not fear retribution** or be subjected to bullying because of their involvement in the FGD, either during the discussion itself or because of backlash from the community or other stakeholders. They should **not be left traumatised** by the process. Carefully choosing a facilitator and questions and gaining consent for participation can reduce the likelihood of any negative consequences for children. • Locations must be **safe from physical dangers**. • Think carefully about how children **will arrive and leave** the FGD, so that this does not put them at risk. • It is useful to have an **additional staff member** or volunteer available who is **not** participating in the FGD, so that if children decide they do not want to participate and want to leave there is someone to **supervise them**/ensure they get back home safely. • Try to find out the background of the children who will be attending. It may not be appropriate for children to participate given their recent experience. For example, if a child has just experienced the death of a parent, talking about family life even if not specifically their life, may be upsetting. • **Additional ongoing support** /referral services should *always* be identified in case a child discloses abuse or becomes upset. If this cannot be secured, then it probably means that the FGD should not take place.
Location	• The location must guarantee **comfort, privacy and confidentiality**. For younger children, new environments and strange adults can cause anxiety. Children are likely to feel comfortable talking with people they know and in **familiar settings**. • Schools are familiar places and can help reduce the power imbalance between participants and the facilitator, although they are not a neutral location and can cause bias (i.e. schools tend to evoke a test-taking mentality and concerns about winning peer approval)[9]. • Try to give children **choice** over location if possible. • Sometimes, there is limited choice of the place (e.g. in a camp, in a detention facility or in a school). Those contexts may pose specific challenges to consider (e.g. adults or onlookers disturbing the course of the focus group) and it is necessary to think through **how to manage these additional dynamics**. • Ideally **let children decide on sitting arrangements**[10]. However, remember that circular seating arrangements (so everyone can see each other) are always better for FGDs. With children, it may be more appropriate to sit on the floor, especially if it will give a more relaxed and informal atmosphere. • **Think carefully about if snack/refreshments are to be provided**, and when these will be distributed. In some contexts, bringing food and drinks may help to engage children. While in others, it may not an be an option

[9] Morgan, M., Gibbs,S., Maxwell, K. and Britten, N. (2002), Hearing children's voices: methodological issues in conducting focus groups with children aged 7-11 years, Qualitative Research 2002 2: 5, Sage.
[10] Gibson, J. (2012) and (2007)

(giving food to children participants and not to others may cause tensions). Giving snacks/refreshments may also influence the children and introduce bias (i.e. children may want to 'please' because they have been given something).

- Ideally, there should **always be water available**.

Time	• Children may have busy schedules and other responsibilities (e.g. work in/outside home, as well as school and homework). As much as possible, **allow children to choose the best time/day** for the FGD. • Remember that children (and adults!) can get bored, so **keep sessions up to 45 minutes for children up to 10 years old or one-hour sessions for older children**. • If possible consider organising 2 sessions of 20 minutes with a **short break** since after 20 minutes the quality of the conversation usually begins to deteriorate[11].
Group composition	• Especially for older children / youth if possible find out in advance about the youths' group dynamic and **try to separate close friends**. • FGD should be **broadly representative of the demographics in the area** of intervention. • **Participants need** to feel comfortable with each other and have some degree of shared experience. • **Always consider Sex and Age.** Conducting separate FGDs for women, girls, men, and boys will help better understand how sex and age changes how the theme of the FGD is experienced. • **Note that Sex and Age is not always be the most important element of difference in a context**. Depending on the theme of the FGD, it could be useful to consider additional diversifying factors (e.g. urban vs rural, affected vs not affected, social group, disability vs without disability, in school vs out-of-school, employed vs unemployed, etc.). Consider segregating groups to get different perspectives, and if groups are mixed observe who is not participating. Consider conducting additional FGDs with population groups that are not participating. • **The nature of the thematic issue as well as the socio-cultural context determine whether we can mix girls and boys** in a FGD. Mixing them is not necessarily a problem – it depends on context. For example, in some settings there may be taboo issues that cannot be discussed in mixed gender groups, or gender dynamics may act as a barrier to girls' participation. Do not make assumptions about what such topics are, consult with the community if this is not known.

Group size	• **Keep the FGD size small.** Small groups replicate natural and familiar form of communication in which children interact together with peers[12].
	• **Age should orient the size of groups**: with younger children (up to 10 years), groups of four to six are ideal to generate discussion and manage activities.
	• Even for older children and youth, the **size of the group matters as it impacts interaction:**
	    ○ *Between 3 and 6 people, everybody talks,*
	    ○ *Between 7 and 10 people, almost everybody talks,*

[11] Morgan, M., Gibbs,S., Maxwell, K. and Britten, N. (2002), Hearing children's voices: methodological issues in conducting focus groups with children aged 7-11 years, Qualitative Research 2002 2: 5, Sage.
[12] Gibson, J. (2012)

       o *Between 11 and 20 people, 5-6 people talk a lot, 3-4 participate in the conversation occasionally, the others remain silent*
       o *Over 20 people: 3-4 people dominate the conversation, and there is therefore little or no actual participation of most participants[13].*

- Practically, it is also very difficult to facilitate the session and takes notes when more than 10 people are present. **For younger children keep the group size between 4-6 and for older children / youth a maximum of 10**.

Age range and abilities

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*For more detailed **information on age and abilities see [Appendix 1](#)***

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For more tips for working with children with communication challenges and disabilities see Resources section

- The cognitive and emotional capacity of the children (i.e. their sensitivities and level of understanding) differs substantially at different ages. For this reason, **keep the age range to no more than two years**.
- **FGD are not suitable for children under 6 years old** due to limited social or language skills. School-aged children are more able to focus their attention and understand the perspective of others, and understand cause and effects[14]
- Remember different age groups behave differently. Respecting this will reduce the impact of **any power dynamics exerted against younger participants**. Children are particularly subjected to **peer pressure and social desirability bias** (i.e. wanting to say the 'right thing' or please the facilitator)*.*
- Questions should be phrased using age appropriate language. **Keep sentence structures simple, and be aware of leading questions** (i.e. questions that would orient them or challenge them too much in from of their peers).
- Remember that children have **fewer life experiences to draw from** compared to adults. This means that examples may need to be given so that children can locate their answers.
- Children should always be allowed **to use their first language**/the language they feel most comfortable using, so accurate translation will be necessary.
- It is a good idea to **discuss with the translators** *before* **the session** the questions that will be asked and what the format of the session will be so that they can be prepared.
- **Where children have communication issues or disabilities, additional support may be necessary** to ensure that they are able to fully participate in discussions, Any group activities, such as warm up / introductory exercise should also be carefully thought through to make sure children with disabilities can take part. Do not invite children to just so there are 'enough participants'.
- **If children cannot be supported to participate fully, then they should not be included in the FGD and another way of collecting their input should be identified.**

Seeking consent and assent

Getting consent does not mean asking someone to sign a form just before the start of the FGD!

Obtaining consent from both children and their parents/caregivers is critical. Children have the right to make their own decision on their participation, based upon a clear understanding on what is the purpose of the FGD and how the information they provide will be used. Where children are too young to give

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[13] Bakewell, O. (2003). Sharpening the Development process. A practical guide to Monitoring and Evaluation, INTRAC, Praxis series N.1, Oxford
[14] Gibson, J. (2007).

legal or informed consent, then their **assent** should be sought. This means confirming that they want to participate, having been informed about the FGD, its purpose and their role.

From the moment we decide to hold FGDs and begin to make arrangements, we should start thinking about consent/assent. Parents and/or caregivers **must be informed, and probably reassured**, in order to overcome resistance or anxiety. In some cases, it might also be necessary to sensitise the community and speak to community leaders to ensure that FGDs can be run safely.

Where children are under the legal age of consent, permission will be required from their parents or legal guardian, that is the person who is responsible for the child.

> 🔍 Tdh Technical brief: informed consent and children - Data protection starter kit

When children are in detention centres, alternative care or are unaccompanied /separated, this may complex, and we may need to get more than one consent– for example for children in detention centres we need to establish if the parents or/and the authority in charge of the detention centre management can give consent.

Once we have established who has the authority to give consent, we need to:

✓ **Provide information about the purpose of the FGD,** so that informed consent can be given. This includes explaining and information gained will be used.

✓ **Exchange practical information** such as timing / dates, how children attend, what will happen if children have to leave earlier.

✓ **Clarify** if there is any reward or benefit for the children to attend.

We also need to decide **the appropriate recording of consent**. In general, we should request written consent, but there are times when asking someone to sign a form may not be appropriate, for example In bureaucratic or repressive political environments, where there is a low level of literacy of participants or where there is a persistence of an oral culture and/or mistrust for written process In such cases if only verbal consent is given then this should be recorded.

When seeking **consent / assent from children** we need to make sure that children are fully informed and understand what it means to be involved in the FGD. This can be done individually, but since it takes time, it could also be done in a group (for example in a Child Friendly Space or school) and then followed up individually with children to check if they want to participate.

There are a number of steps that should be followed when orientating children to a FGD and seeking their participation[15]:

- **Introduction** (name and organisation, rather than role or function);
- **Explain** the purpose of the research and why it is important - **making sure** children understand that we are not making any promises about improving their conditions of their life;
- **Inform** children that consent is also being sought from their parents, but that even if their parents agree if children do not want to take part they do not have to, and they do not need to give any reason;
- **Let children know** who they will meet at the FGD, for example if it is going to be facilitated by someone else;
- **Inform** children how they will be involved, how much of their time will be required, and how (e.g. *'we will meet together in a small group and do an activity and then have a discussion'*)–based on the format of the FGD);

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[15] Regional Working Group on Child Labour. (2002) *Handbook for action-oriented research on the worst forms of child labour including trafficking in children*. See 'Traffic light' technique for seeking the informed consent of children, page 117, 118.

- **Advise** children what kind of information will be collected, how it will be collected, and how it will be used (for example, '*to write a report to give to the people who fund the programme*', or '*so we can improve the services we provide*');
- **Reassure** children about confidentiality but explain any limit (e.g. '*what children tell us will stay private and we won't tell anyone that it was you that said something. But, if you did tell me something that made me worried about you, I would talk to you after the session to see if we needed to speak to someone else to make sure you get help.*');
- **Check** that children understand what they have been told by them by asking them to repeat back what they have understood;
- **Give** children time to ask questions or raise concerns;
- **Ensure** children know that they can stop taking part at any time or not answer a question if they do not want to.
- **Recording** that consent/assent is given.

In certain contexts, getting access to children can be difficult. For example, in detention centres or refugee camps, we may not be able to select the participants according to a set of clearly defined criteria (e.g. authorities may allow only 'good children' to take part). We need to decide in advance what we will do if an adult or authority wishes a child to participate but the child clearly does not wish to do so.

Role of the facilitator and note-taker/observer

A good facilitator with adults might not be as good with youth or children. **All FGDs with children <u>must</u> be facilitated by someone who has suitable experience and confidence in facilitating consultations with children, and who is skilled in communicating with children.** To do this, the facilitator must:

- Be knowledgeable of social, emotional and cognitive development processes of children – and be able to assess these, and adapt the plan for the session, or rephrase questions to adjust to the needs of the children in the FGD;

- Be sensitive of children's emotions, and show interest and respect for children's opinions, knowledge and skills.

- Be patient, and not dominate or try to provide answers for children (although prompt where necessary by giving examples);

- Listen to all views, and avoid judging or condemning;

- Be able to use to suitable language, games, art, songs, visuals or animation techniques in order to facilitate communicate with children;

- Be able to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that encourages children to speak out and participate, but at the same time not feel pressurised into speaking if they do not want to;

- Be able to manage the dynamics of groups of children, to ensure that all children are able to participate and to give space to share their views without fearing ridicule or judgement;

- Know the language, local dialect and expressions used by the children, according to their age or make sure that the translator is properly briefed and able to provide appropriate translation;

- Be able to adopt the right communication techniques with children with disabilities or special needs, or work with another adult or child who provides communication support to ensure that all children can participate;

- Know dress and behavioural codes which are relevant to the context. This includes the use of example body language and eye contact;

- Be aware of the socio-cultural context in which the children live and have some understanding of their background / experiences. This includes understanding gender and age dynamics in the society;

- Recognise child safeguarding concerns and know how to respond to these, and understand ethical issues regarding working with children;

- Recognise that we are all members of a social group, age, gender etc. and have our own potential bias. Children may be particularly influenced by the image that the facilitator projects which may influence their answers. This is a particularly important issue when we are facilitating groups with children who come from a different background or culture.

Although it might seem as though the facilitator has the primary role in the FGD, the role of the **note-taker/observer is just as important.**   Since the purpose of FGDs is to get information that can be analysed in order to provide a basis for decision making, the quality of the recording will affect this as much as the quality of the facilitation.

The **role of the note-taker / observer has two functions: to record content** (what was said, by who) **and process** (such as who did most of the talking, or whether children became especially animated or angry or whether they had difficulty answering a question etc.).

The note-taker/observer should be introduced to the group, and their role explained. This is important so that **children understand that they are not being 'marked' or assessed as this may make them feel unable to participate fully**. It is helpful to explain that the note-taker/observer will not be participating and will not ask questions, although they may ask someone to repeat their answer if they did not understand.

At the beginning of the session, the note-taker/observer should record **who is participating (disaggregated by sex and age).** It is helpful to **draw a small diagram of where people are sitting** so that it is easy to record in the notes who said what. For example, if five boys were participating in a FGD, the note -taker could reference them 1-5 (noting their ages) and then when recording what was said put the number in brackets beside the statement. Using this method, a recording where the boys gave their opinions on physical violence, would look something like this in the notes:

> *'All children are hit by their mothers, but fathers only hit boys'*(1)
>
> *'Yes, but grandfathers often hit children too'* (5)
>
> *'I think that boys are hit much more than girls'* (2) Looking angry.
>
> Boys agreeing that this is true (1) and (4)

The advantage of this kind of recording is that later on it is easy to track themes emerging and trends. For example, in the recording above, it can be seen that Boy 4 did not participate, and Boy 2 looked angry. By checking the ages of the children, when we are analysing the data later, we might gain additional information regarding differences between the situation for children. This can be especially useful in mixed groups, as we may see that some issues are more pressing for girls or boys. This could help us re-orientate the programme. The other advantage of using a reference for the participants is that it **automatically anonymises the record of the FGD because no names appear on records of the FGDs.**.

Where possible the note-taker/observer **should use the actual words of the children** (putting them in quotation marks: "[quoted words]"), **without trying to interpret** what the child means. Doing this will

mean that when the data is analysed it will be clear when the note-taker has summarised what was said (the note -taker should try to avoid doing this as much as possible) or has provided an observation.

In theory if the facilitator does not speak the language of the children there may be three adults in the FGD – the facilitator, the translator and the note-taker/observer. However, in practice what tends to happen is that the facilitator **works with a translator who is also skilled in working with children** (such as one of the project team staff) and the facilitator also takes the notes. Where this is the case it is important that the translator i**s given a full briefing on the format of the FGD**. It is also important to have **someone who is not working with the children on a regular basis acting as the translator,** even if they are known to the children (such as the programme manager) to avoid the translator including their own views of the situation.

Format of the FGD – questions and activities

Before designing questions and activities, we need to consider the purpose of the focus group, and specifically what we hope to learn. These are called the '**research questions'**. Being clear about the research questions and the groups of children we will be working with helps us to develop an appropriate format for the FGD.

Sometimes we already know who we will be conducting a FGD with (for example if we are consulting children participating in a sports project which is targeted at adolescent girls, we know we will be conducting a FGD with older girls). In other cases, the format of the FGD can only be established once we have decided what population groups it is important and possible[16] to include.

Irrespective of whether the **format of the FGD** or the logistics and practical considerations are explored first, there needs to be a link. In practice what tends to happen is that the groups of children to be invited to FGDs are already decided in advance, and the format of the FGDs is developed at the same time that logistical and practical considerations are explored. **Then once the groups are finalised, the format is reviewed to ensure that it reflects the individual needs of children attending** (for example if children have disabilities and as a consequence activity need to be adapted or replaced to ensure all children can participate fully).

It is recommended and is good practice once the format of the FGD has been devised to run one group as a 'pilot'. This will provide an opportunity to test that the questions work, whether any activities are successful, whether the FGD takes more time than anticipated, and that the information we obtain is of the depth and quality we need. The format of the FGD can then be revised accordingly.

Where we are going to be conducting more than one FGD, and in particular where several people are involved in facilitating FGDs are part of a lager study, it is important to give proper instructions on how the FGDs should be organised and run as this gives consistency and allows for comparison between FGDs. It also helps to ensure that the ethical issues are properly addressed. This normally takes the form of a **short written guide, often referred to as FGD protocol or a research protocol**.

> Caution: even if time is short and tight, make sure that a FGD protocol is produced, it is a compulsory step at Tdh.

If all the necessary preparations have been carried out, and an appropriate format has been developed for the FGDs, it is likely that they will go smoothly. Occasionally problems are encountered, and it is worth thinking through how difficult situations can be handled in advance, especially if those asked to facilitate have less experience in conducting FGDs. **Appendix 2 Strategies for dealing with common challenges contains a number of commonly encountered challenges and strategies for how to respond should they happen**.

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[16] See "Logistical & Practical Considerations" section.

Figure 1: Overview of planning & preparation phases of FGDs

```
┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Defining     │   │ Decide what  │   │ Decide if FGD│   │              │
│ information   │ → │ are the      │ → │ is the       │ → │ Develop      │
│ gaps and     │   │ objectives   │   │ appropriate  │   │ protocol and │
│ needs        │   │ and learning/│   │ method       │   │ FGD guide    │
│              │   │ research     │   │ according to │   │              │
│              │   │ questions,   │   │ objective,   │   │              │
│              │   │ prepare      │   │ context,     │   │              │
│              │   │ analysis plan│   │ sources and  │   │              │
│              │   │              │   │ resources.   │   │              │
└──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
                                                                 ↓
┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Organisation │   │ Introduce and│   │              │   │ Pilot -      │
│ - logistics  │ ← │ get necessary│ ← │ Select       │ ← │ review : do  │
│              │   │ approval     │   │ participants │   │ the questions│
│              │   │              │   │              │   │ work?        │
└──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
```

Deciding and formulating questions

The research questions should guide the questions we ask the participants. Remember though, that **the research questions should not be confused with the questions that will be asked to the participants**. We need to make sure that we convert the questions we ask children into language that they can understand, and we ask them questions that they can answer.

When we are formulating the questions, we need to keep in mind that we should:

✓ Always ask participants about **issues they are familiar with** and can answer.

✓ **Not ask participants the research question directly**, for example we should not ask '*what is your wellbeing status?*'! Questions should be asked in user-friendly, age appropriate ways using words which are familiar to the participants.

✓ Try to ask questions that start with 'what' and 'how'. We can then probe answers with 'why' questions. **Why questions are very difficult to answer for younger children**, as they require abstract thought, and for older children they can feel as if we want them to justify rather than explain.

> **Do not ask too many questions!**
>
> Limit your set of FGD questions. We see, too often, focus groups protocols made of several pages of questions. 6 – 8 main questions is a good guide. These can then be followed up and probed further during the discussion.
>
> Remember in a FGD we are seeking quality and depth of the answers, not the number of questions answered. Where there are many questions that need to be asked, then another format, such as a survey is more appropriate.

✓ **Avoid closed questions** (Yes/No, or one word answer questions), unless they are used to clarify that something is happening or relevant, before asking for elaboration. Closed questions tend to shut down communication, rather than opening up discussions.

✓ **When the topic is sensitive**, do not ask direct questions but instead raise discussion on a sub topic and allow participants to discuss freely first, before probing, or ask children to talk about talking

about the topic in third person or others' experience.   This means not necessarily narrating their own personal experience (e.g. talking about what is happening in the community in general, rather than with them and their households, or talking about what they have heard about and seen, rather than what they have experienced).

Table 4 shows some real examples of questions that have been asked in FGDs with children which are not appropriate, and notes why the they are not suitable, and how they could be improved. .

*Table 4: Examples of in-appropriate questions*

Unhelpful / inappropriate question	What's wrong with the question?	How could it be improved?
Does the school/ facility provide a feeding programme for the children? (If yes, identify whether communal/state sponsored, type of feeding programme, how many days per week. Total beneficiaries) (*Example taken from Tdh FGD developed for assessment – targeted at IDPs*)	This question is addressed to the wrong audience – it includes too many elements and asks for information it is unlikely children would know. It explores the 'what' and not the 'why' and the 'how'. Remember FGDs are about quality, not numbers. This information is probably more relevant for a structured questionnaire administered to school authorities,	Are children in your school provided with food? Do you get it? [If yes] What do you think about the food that is given out in school?
What were you working or studying before you left? What type of work/what type of school? (*Example taken from Tdh FGD*)	This question does not trigger in-depth conversation and interaction between the group members. Rather it aims at collecting individual stories / qualitative information. This question should be administered through an individual interview.	Before you came to live here, what did children do? (prompt with work / school). How were things different before in children's lives compared with today?
What do you think are the main child protection issues in your community? (*Example taken from INGO FGD*)	This is a very common error of asking participants the 'research question' using technical words and not every day language.	Do you feel safe around here? What are the sorts of things that make children living here feel unsafe / worried?
Where do you seek services to address children protection issues? (Mention all available service providers and the service they provide) (*Example taken from a FGD guide used for a situation analysis*)	Asks the participants to answer the 'research question'. The objective of this question is not to explore in depth opinions, meanings and practices, but to list services. In this case, a desk review, a Key Informant Interview or a household survey should have been conducted. The FGD should focus on whether participants know about services, whether those services are used, how and why.	If children had a problem in the community, where could they go for help? How do you think they would be helped? Is there anywhere that children would not go for help? Why not?

Table 4: Examples of in-appropriate questions

Unhelpful / inappropriate question	What's wrong with the question?	How could it be improved?
To what extent do you feel you have a responsibility to intervene or act if you identify abusive/illegal/exploitive practices against children in your community? *(Example taken from a FGD guide used for a situation analysis)*	This question may seem too complicated because it uses technical language ('abusive, illegal, exploitative') and difficult to answer (notion: 'to what extent'). It may sound judgmental or biased (pushing people to answer that they feel responsible).	If a child faces violence in the community, how do adults react generally? [Probe questions: for girls/ boys? For which problems?] Do you think children might also react? What would they do?
Has violent behaviour increased in your homes in the last 3 months? How do your parents discipline you? *(Example taken from INGO FGD)*	These questions are difficult to address in a FGD because they sensitive and threatening (participants are asked to reveal intimate facts of their private lives). When sensitive, a question should be oriented towards the exploration of general practices in the communities, and not the participants themselves.	Let's imagine that a child does something seriously wrong, like beating others, or stealing. Typically, how might their parents react? What about a police officer or a teacher?
How do you like living in this community? Are your neighbours also IDPs and returnees like yourself? What kind of relationship do you have with people in this area who are not IDPs or returnees? *(Example taken from Tdh FGD)*	Question may be embarrassing for children. It also targets personal experience and uses technical jargon (IDPs, returnees). It also labels participants, and this may affect how children see themselves and others.	How are the relationships between people who have arrived recently, with those who have lived here for a long time? Are there any difficulties experienced? What solutions do you see?

Format of the FGD & facilitation process

All FGDs should follow the same basic format, and have four phases, as shown in Figure 2.
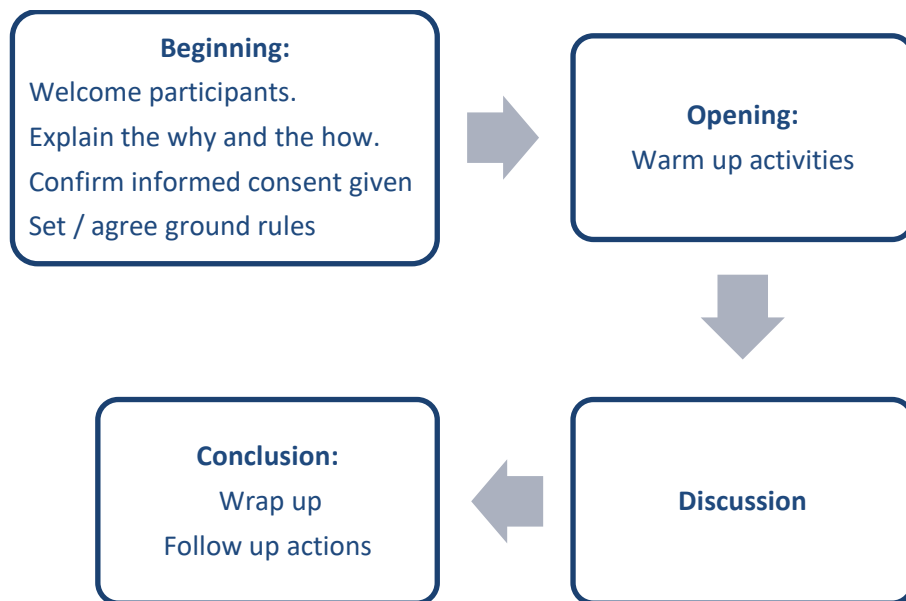
Figure 2: Phases of the FGD facilitation

The art of a facilitating a Focus Group Discussion is to succeed in creating a group dynamic, and having the participants interacting with each other, not talking only to the facilitator and taking turns to speak. This relies on the skills of the facilitator, and also the way the FGD is structured in terms of the questions asked and any activities included. Facilitating a Focus Group Discussion with children, especially younger children, will not resemble a traditional adult FGD.

Additionally, FGDs with children may have a **certain pedagogical function**. If a question or an issue is raised, it may be important to address it and **provide good advice or information to children** participating. Of course, this needs to be carefully balanced with the role of the facilitator who is there to get information from children, and who may not have the necessary knowledge. We also need to consider time. A quick answer may be appropriate to give, but long or complex explanations are probably best handled outside of the FGD by staff who are used to working with the children, and/or can establish a longer term relationship with them.

Phase 1 – Beginning

The beginning is critical: **it will set the atmosphere and determinate how comfortable children will feel, which will impact the quality of the discussio**n. In many societies, there is an inherent power differential in adult-child relationships. This can cause children to mistrust unknown adults or fear speaking out. **This may be particularly challenging** in highly structured and hierarchical groups or communities, or in places where freedom of speech is not welcome (such as detention centres, armed or political conflict settings, bureaucratic or repressive societies). In humanitarian situations where children have experienced many losses and traumas they may find it difficult to speak.

Some ways we can establish a positive beginning to the FGD include:

✓ **Greet** children as they arrive. Family members should also be **welcomed** if they have brought their children to the FGD, as they need to feel that they are leaving their child in a safe and comfortable environment.

✓ Before getting into the discussions and exercises, **remind children of the purpose of the FGD**, what they will be doing and double check that children are still willing to participate.

> **It is a good idea to include in the FGD protocol a script/checklist** to be covered at the beginning of the FGD. This should be included in the instructions for the facilitator. Having a script/checklist prepared means that we can be sure that all the important information that needs to be given/confirmed at the start of the FGD is not forgotten or overlooked.

✓ **Set/negotiate ground rules**[17]. Ideally ground rules should be negotiated and developed with children, but this can be very time consuming. It is often more pragmatic to suggest rules and ask children to agree, and if there is anything they would like to add. Suggested ground rules include:

- *'You can pass on any question that you do not want to answer.'*
- *'You can take times to think before answering a question'.*
- *'Let me know if I do not understand you, or you do not understand what I mean'*
- *'You can use any word that would express the best what you want to say, and not what you think that I want to hear. There is no right or wrong answer'.*
- *'Respect each other and do not interrupt the other participants. Everyone will get a chance to speak, speak one at a time, you do not have to put up your hand to talk'.*
- *'We can disagree, but we should not make fun of others' ideas'[18].*

✓ **Confirm confidentiality and anonymity**. This will normally be something like: '*All answers and anything you say are confidential, which means that your names will not be shared with anyone else, and not put in the report. If someone wants to look back at them to know who said this or that, he/she will not manage to find out, because the names will not be recorded. Everything that is being said should stay within the group. But if I am concerned about you, I may ask to talk to you afterwards, so we can decide the best way to help'.*

Phase 2 – Opening

This phase 'warms up' participants and gets them ready for the discussion. It also gives children a chance to introduce themselves, if they do not know already.

> TOOL : Need inspiration about icebreakers?
> ✓ Icebreakers and games for kids
> ✓ 40 Icebreakers for small groups

A fun quick exercise, used as an energiser, can help start the process, before moving onto **an introductory activity**. Introductory activities should be simple and easy for children to participate in order to help children begin to feel comfortable. For example, give children cards / photographs and ask them to discuss together and then feedback their opinion on what the cards / photos convey. This is a good exercise because there are no right answers – children say what they think, which can then be validated. Once children seem relaxed and prepared to talk, we can move onto the next phase, discussion.

> Remember to use culturally accepted introduction and starters (e.g. prayer, song, games, etc) and due formalities, to make sure children feel comfortable.

Phase 3 – Discussion

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[17] Morgan, M., Gibbs, S., Maxwell, K., Britten, N. (2002), Gibson (2012)
[18] Gibson (2012), p. 2

The term discussion is a bit misleading as Phase 3 does not just include talking. This is the stage of the FGD where we ask the 6 – 8 questions that have been prepared, based upon our research questions. This is the information that we want from children. **However, because we know that children sometimes find it boring and/or intimidating or difficult to sit and talk with adults, we can use activities as a way of stimulating the discussion**. The activities that are selected should be based/designed around the profile of the children participating in the FGD, for example their age, cognitive development, and experiences, and taking into account any particularly communication issues or disabilities that children may have which could affect their participation.

There are many different activities and methods we can use, but sometimes being able to use such activities and methods may be constrained by logistical and practical issues.

Caution: Apart from costs involved, the use of activities can prolong the time needed for the FGD or need more space than is available. We sometimes need to balance the benefits of using an with the limitation of resources available. However, that is not to say that even if there is are resources, **we cannot do anything that is engaging and fun, but we might need to be more creative**. For example, we might not able to take puppets and toys to a FGD, but we are likely to be able to at least take paper and pencils.

Activities and methods that can be used include:

Case studies / scenarios – Use hypothetical scenarios related to the area being discussed in the FGD. For example, where a child is found in a difficult situation and needs to take action, one way to proceed could be to divide participants into two groups and give the groups the task of coming up with three actions which the child in the story could do, before bringing the group back together to share and discuss in the large group different actions identified. The discussion could then conclude as a group with deciding what would be the most likely actions children in their community would take in real life.

Drawings - For example, ask children to draw a map of their community and then to plot places they feel safe, unsafe etc, or ask children to draw a situation before debating in the group.

Role plays - Ask participants to act out a scene. For example, present the group with the topic and ask children to play the roles of the people involved (this could be done individually – i.e. each child plays a role) or in a group (so small groups take on the role together). After the role play is ended, bring children back together to discuss.

> **Warning!**
> Scenarios, role plays or asking children to draw situations can all evoke **powerful memories and emotions for children,** especially in situations where children have suffered loss and trauma.
>
> When using such activities, we must be **sensitive to the context and ensure that we do no trigger anxiety or retraumatise children.** For example, we should never ask children to role play a child that has been sexually abused, or draw a picture about when their village was attacked.
>
> Remember the purpose of a FGD is to find out about children's lives and perspectives, **it is not a therapeutic group session.**

Prioritisation and ranking - Ask children to identify issues / priorities and then to rank or prioritise them for example using stickers or stones to vote.

When using activities, especially art, there are a number of things we need to particularly consider beforehand or remember to do during the FGD:

✓ **Think about our response if children want to take away materials /supplies** (not just their work but the supplies). This can be difficult where children have very little by way of resources, but at the same time can cause upset if other children who have not attended the FGD do not have the same supplies. One way of avoiding this is to be clear when introducing the exercise– e.g. '*At the end I will ask for the pencils back as I need to take them with me to use with some other children'*.

✓ **Keep things simple**. There is limited time so make sure that activities etc do not involve long instructions. Children **may also become bored and distracted if they cannot immediately 'get going'**.

✓ Think about **strategies** for how to manage **if children do not engage with the activity or change it**. For example, we might ask children to draw a picture of a situation and they may choose to draw a flower, or we ask children to draw something, thinking it will be a quick exercise and they become engrossed in colouring in their picture. One benefit of conducting a '**pilot' FGD is to test how activities and questions work**.

✓ **Try not to mirror school in the activities**. Some children find school difficult or have gaps in their schooling, so we should try to avoid activities that might feel too much like 'schoolwork', such as reading long lists or having to write answers down.

✓ If possible (and authorised) take photographs of everything! Children may want to take their work away, but even if not, taking a photograph can be very useful to attach to the written record of the FGD or can help in writing up the record.

Even using activities and methods, it can be hard to keep discussions on track with children. Children **may tend to give one-word answers to questions that they do not identify as relevant to their experience**[19] or may struggle to express their ideas. Young children especially **do not always speak sequentially or logically and may jump around between thoughts. Patience is important as we need to give children the opportunity to express what they want to say**, without redirecting the conversation in a different direction they would have gone otherwise, thus biasing the process. See Appendix 1 "Tips: how to adapt to age and cognitive capacity" for more insights on **age and cognitive capacity** and Tdh technical note on how to mitigate bias and errors when collecting data from children.

While the 6 – 8 questions should be developed for the FGD, these are not the only questions that we should ask, particularly if we want to stay away from a question and answer format (in which case we should use a survey as a data collection method and not an FGD) and instead have discussion, debate, and dialogue between participants. During the FGD we will need to introduce, probe and follow up the main questions, by asking **different types of questions and using statements**:

- **Introductory:** These introduce participants to the discussion topic and make them feel more comfortable sharing their opinion with the group. We can use them at the very beginning of the FGD or when we want to move onto a new topic. Introductory questions can be answered with a brief, easy response. For example:

  - '*In this project, Tdh has …….. What do you know about the activities that were organised?'* (introductory question)
  - *'Now I'm hoping that you will let me ask you some questions about what it's like to . . .'* (introductory statement).

- **Follow up & probing:** These questions help to continue discussion and to delve deeper into the discussion topic. For example

  - '*So, you have just raised this point…'* (to confirm understanding) *'Does it mean that …?'* (to explore further)
  - *'Could you tell me more about this?'*
  - *'Who would you agree with this opinion?'*
  - *'Does anyone think something different?'*
  - *'So, you think that it is also true in*

> **Silence** is very common in FGDs. Leave time for participants to think.
>
> Silence may be very meaningful, so take note of what is happening during such moments.

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[19] Morgan, M., Gibbs, S., Maxwell, K., Britten, N. (2002), Gibson (2012).

> *your community?'*
- *'Could you give an example of… ?'*

- **Exit**: Exit questions are used to check that nothing has been missed. They can be asked both before transitioning to the next discussion topic, and at the end of the FGD. For example:

  - *'So, we mentioned [this] and [that]. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?'*
  - *'Thanks for sharing all your thoughts with me. What I understood is… does it sound correct?'*
  - *' Is there anything that you would like to add or ask?'*

Phase 4 - Conclusion

When the discussion has completed children should be thanked for their participation and reminded of how the information they have given will be used, checking if there is anything that they do not want shared.

It a good idea to end the FGD with a nice group activity (an exercise or game similar to the warm up) so that children **leave on a positive note**. We should also make sure that children are collected/arrangements for them to travel home or where they need to go are in place, ensuring that children are not left unsupervised.

Actions immediately following the FGD

Once the children have left the FGD, if necessary, we must follow up any **concerns / referrals that are necessary regarding safeguarding issues** or any further support that might be necessary.

The other big task that needs to be completed is to **write up the notes of the FGD**. This should be done as soon as possible, and ideally on the same day (often in the evening). Although this is primarily the role of the note-taker/observer, the facilitator should check the notes to see if there is anything that they want to add or remember differently and to check for accuracy. Sometimes, when many FGDs are being conducted over several sites, a reference is given so that it is clear which records are for which FGD. If not, the note-taker should make sure that the date, location and time is written on the record.

Caution:

Writing up notes can be a long process, and **it is always tempting to delay finalising the record of the FGD**. However, especially if several FGD are to be conducted, **it can become very confusing later when all the FGDs seem to 'merge' into one** and it is impossible to recall what happened. Notes handwritten quickly during a FGD are often not as clear as they seem at the time!

How to analyse FGD data

Analysis is the process which turns data into meaningful information to help us in making decisions. **Analysis is the last step in the FGD process, and until it is done the FGDs are not completed.**

This section gives a brief overview of how to analyse data from FGDs and turn it into useful information.[20] It is not a difficult process – the key is being organised and methodical – but it does take practice to feel confident. It also takes time. If a consultant or specialist is involved, for example if FGDs have been conducted and are being used with other methods for collecting data, such as surveys and interviews,

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[20] It is useful to note the process of analysis for FGDs is the same as for interviews

the specialist may either analyse the data or help with the process. If not, the Quality & Accountability Unit from Tdh can provide assistance and more in-depth guidance.

In any event, analysis should not be conducted in isolation. **Analysis requires neutrality, objectivity and critical thinking**. This is why content analysis is most often done with a peer or in a group, as this helps the 'analysts' not to be (too) driven by their own representations and emotions, and to remain as objectvie as possible.

Steps in the anaysis process

Step 1 – Revisit the purpose of the FGDs

Go back to the research questions and begin to think about what information is needed to be able to answer the questions. This will help to mentally start the process of analysis.

Step 2 – Make copies and organise the records of the FGD

This is a pratical tip **–** it is useful to make sure that there are copies of all the records so that its possible to refer back to the original record if necessary. During the coding process records get written on and shuffled about so it is always good to have an unmarked copy to refer to if things get confusing.[21]

The records of the **FGDs should be organised in a logical way** – but probably not in date order. For example, it might be useful to group all FGDs with boys together (if FGDs have been held separately with boys and girls), or to have all rural settings in the same place. Doing this will help with comparisons and speed up the process of analysis since FGDs from similar sources are likely to have similar themes.

Remember we need to check requirements in country about data protection and how records should be stored and kept. This is useful to include in the FGD protocol so that if there are several people involved in conducting FGDs everyone is clear about requirments.

Step 3 : First immersion in the material

After having organised our data we should ideally allocate some time to get familiar with the material, line by line, page by page, writing down initial impressions, comments and ideas. This helps get an 'overall pictute' or 'feel' for the information.

Step 4 - Coding

One of the main steps in the analysis process is **coding**. Our analysis is based upon the recurring concepts and themes which have emerged in the FGDs. The analysis is therefore based upon categorisation (coding) of the data.

As shown Figure 3, if we are coding manually, that is to say by hand, in practice we will be writing and/or highlighting on the records of the FGDs. This is why is recommended to make a copy of the original.

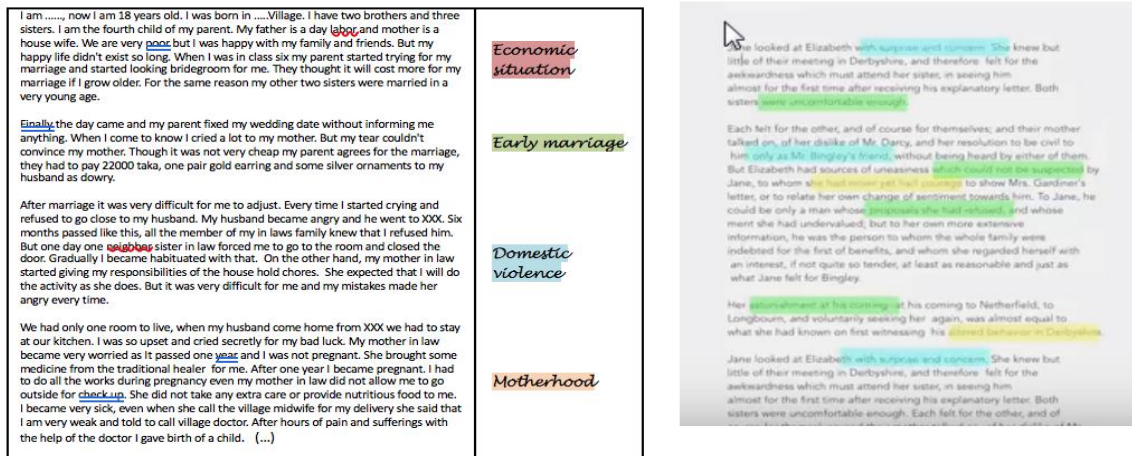[21] If you use focus groups as part of a study that combines methods, refer to Tdh Analysis plan template.

Figure 3: Examples of coded transcripts / records

When we are coding, **we are looking at patterns, similarities, relationships, to explain why things happen – linked to the research questions**. Codes are "**summative statements**". This process is called "**reduction**", as we are trying to make sense of a big volume of data, summarising and explaining what it means. Data can be analysed using a set of pre-defined codes (e.g. types of emotions, categories of protection concerns, services) or using exploratory coding, where the codes emerge as we go through the records.

Choosing whether to use pre-defined or exploratory coding is linked to personal preference and knowledge. Were we already know what themes and issues are associated with a particular topic/research question it might be easy to develop pre-designed codes. Where the topic is new, it may be better to use exploratory coding, highlighting basic patterns on a couple of records to give a first set of codes which can then be applied on all the records.

Irrespective of whether we use pre-defined or exploratory codes, the process of coding is iterative. This means that we go back and forth, refining the coding process. For example, after coding five records, we may have to go back and review the codes, or if we are working with others, we may discuss the themes emerging and the codes we are using in order to harmonise our analysis.

Many people think that they need a specific software for coding. Such software is an advanced way of helping to manage the data analysis which and is particularly useful when dealing with a big amount of data. This is unlikely to be necessary for most of the situations we work in, and if this is happening, we would certainly be accompanied by a specialist.

Step 5 – Classification

Once we are happy with the codes, the next step is **classification**. **This turns the codes into categories of codes**, **grouping them together and defining them,** as shown in Figure 4. Again this is an iterative process. As we start categorising, we may decide to rename the categories, or split them if they become too broad and cover too many codes.

Text	Codes	Category
sisters. I am the fourth child of my parent. My father is a day labour and mother is a house wife. We are very poor but I was happy with my family and friends. But my happy life didn't exist so long. When I was in class six my parent started trying for my marriage and started looking bridegroom for me. They thought it will cost more for my marriage if I grow older. For the same reason my other two sisters were married in a very young age.	Economic situation Early marriage Domestic violence Motherhood	Vulnerability factors
Finally the day came and my parent fixed my wedding date without informing me anything. When I come to know I cried a lot to my mother. But my tear couldn't convince my mother. Though it was not very cheap my parent agrees for the marriage, they had to pay 22000 taka, one pair gold earring and some silver ornaments to my husband as dowry.		Life events-sequences
After marriage it was very difficult for me to adjust. Every time I started crying and refused to go close to my husband. My husband became angry and he went to XXX. Six months passed like this, all the member of my in laws family knew that I refused him. But one day one neighbour sister in law forced me to go to the room and closed the door. Gradually I became habituated with that. On the other hand, my mother in law started giving my responsibilities of the house hold chores. She expected that I will do the activity as she does. But it was very difficult for me and my mistakes made her angry every time.		Emotions

Figure 4: Example of classification

The process of coding and classification helps us **to sift through all the data collected to pull out the information that we need to know in order to answer our research questions**, and to be able to organise it in a way that will help in the analysis.

Step 6 – Analysis

Coding and classification can be very time consuming, but **analysis depends on the reliability of the data collection process (i.e. the quality of the recording) and how thorough we are with the coding and classification**. **If coding manually it can be useful to use an excel sheet**, particularly if a number of FGDs have been conducted to keep track of the information and so that during the analysis stage we do not have to keep going back to the records as all our information will be in one place.[22]

The coding and categories are not the analysis. They are used to help us make sense of the information, and analyse what it means. **Questions that may help to guide the analysis include**:

- What are the issues arrising? Are they consistant from one group to another? Are there differences? Contraditions?
- Are there recurring arguments?
- What are the emerging stories?
- How can extreme situations be explained?
- What are the issues most / less present?

Deeper analysis bring us from a pure descriptive to explanatory levels[23] :

- What is there in the data? (exploratory analysis)
- What is happening-felt-expressed, for whom, where, when, how? (descriptive – summarising and compare)

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[22] See examples in Eliot, S(2015), Using qualitative data with Excel.

[23] For more information see the analysis Spectrum, Acaps (2013) Compared to what ? Analysis thinking and humanitarian assessment. Technical brief.

- Why is this happening-felt-expressed, how come? (explanatory – connect and relate)

During our analysis we should always recognise and be transparent about the **limitations** of the data we have collected and the conclusions we can draw. For example, if we did not have adequate translation, then this almost certainly will have constrained the effectiveness of the faciliation, the quality of the recording, and hence the reliability of the analysis. Recognising the limitations of the data does not devalue it, but it helps us and others make sense of the conclusions we make.

Step 7 – Using the analysis

Unless FGDs are conducted purely for research, the analysis from them should be used as the basis for future decision making. In the case of FGDs undertaken by Tdh, this will always be the case. The knowledge we have obtained, being informed by our analysis of the FGDs, together with other data (from for example interviews and desk reviews) should be used to inform the design and reorientation of programmes and interventions.
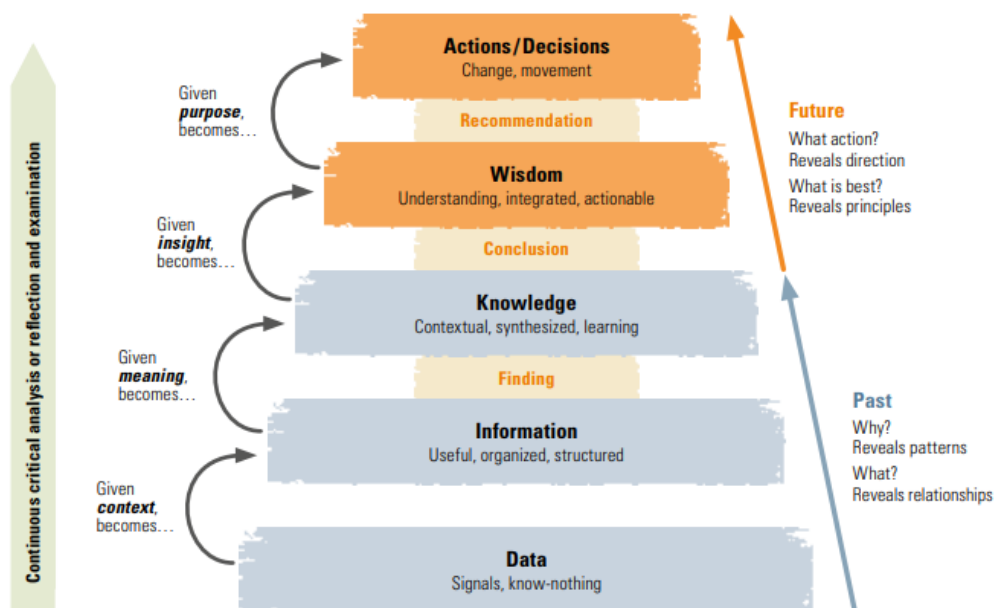

Figure 5: Project Cycle Management[24]

The analysis process should therefore bring us to a more prescriptive level :
- "what else? "what should be done?" (Prescriptive analysis – suggest and advise)

Last thoughts….

FGDs can make a signification contribution to Project Cycle Management (see table page 7), and importantly in the improvement of the quality of our actions. However, they should only be used when they are the most appropriate method for collecting data and when we can ensure that the design and facilitation, together with the required logistical and practical considerations can be given the attention

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[24] Tdh (2017) *Project Cycle Management in Emergencies and Humanitarian Crisis Handbook*

it needs. This requires that FGDs are well thought out, planned, and sufficient resources are made available. Similarly, time needs to be invested for analysing the data, and making sense of what children tell us.

To support country and programme teams in carrying out FGDs, Appendix 4 contains a checklist which can be used as a reminder of actions that are required.

Resources & references

Tdh toolkit – reference documents:

Tdh Quality & Accountability unit: (2017) *Project Cycle Management in Emergency and Humanitarian Crisis Handbook.*

Tdh Quality & Accountability unit (2017) : survey pack (www.tdh-qa-unit.com) – Technical note. "Bias and errors" – "Choosing the right methodological approach" – Study Protocol template – Analysis Plan template.

Tdh (2018), *Global Code of Conduct and Safeguarding policy.*

Tdh (2017), *Data protection starter kit. Note on informed consent – assent with children*.

Tdh (2018), *Child Protection Good Practice Framework*. A guide to promoting quality child protection across all programmes (draft version).

Laugh, run and move to develop together. Games with a psychosocial aim (https://www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/documents/laugh-run-and-move-develop-together).

UN Agencies & Non-Governmental Organisations:

Knox, G., *40 Icebreakers for Small Groups*, https://insight.typepad.co.uk/

International HIV/AIDS alliance (2002), *100 ways to energise groups. Games to use in workshops, meetings and the community*, Brighton.

Brus, A., (2017) *How to conduct a qualitative and quantitative study? From planning to using findings. Humanity & Inclusion*, Lyon.

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Boyden, J., Ennew, J.(1997), *Children in Focus – a manual for participatory research with Children*, StC Sweden, Stockholm

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IRC (2018). IRC Basic Gender Analysis – Gender Specific Focus Group Discussion Guide

Elio, S.t (2015). *Using Excel for qualitative analysis*, retrieved from Better evaluation website – www.betterevaluation.org

ACAPS (2013). *Technical Brief. Compared to what? Analytical thinking and need assessments*

ACAPS (2014). *Humanitarian Needs Assessment: The Good Enough Guide. The Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS),* Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB) and Practical Action Publishing, Rugby, UK.

ACAPS, (2016) Technical Brief. Cognitive biases.

Academic literature:

Gibson, J.E. (2012). 'Interviews and focus groups with children: methods that match children's developing competencies.' *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 4 : 148–159

Gibson, F. (2007). 'Conducting focus groups with children and young people: strategies for success'. Journal *Research in Nursing*. Sage Publications. Vol 12 (5) pp. 473-483

De Leeuw, E. (2011) Improving data quality when surveying children and adolescents: cognitive and social development and its Role in Questionnaire Construction and Pretesting. Naantali.

Beazley H, Bessell S, Ennew J, Waterson R. (2009) 'The right to be properly researched: research with children in a messy, real world'. *Children's Geographies* 7:4, pages 365-378.

Morgan, M., Gibbs, S., Maxwell, K., Britten, N. (2002). *Hearing Children's Voices: Methodological issues in conducting focus groups with children aged 7-11 years*, 2(1), pp.5-20.

Other resources (websites – videos):

https://www.kidactivities.net/icebreaker-games-for-kids/

https://youthgroupgames.com.au/top-ten-icebreaker-games/

www.betterevaluation.org

Video series : coding cycle in qualitative research https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oufGDGpFQmo

Appendix 1 – Tips: how to adapt to age & congnitive capacity[25]

Age groups and cognitive capacity	Implication
Early childhood	
• Under 6 years of age: children tend to think **dichotomously, have limited vocabulary** to describe emotions, have **volatile concentration**, are bored quickly, are very sensitive to their environment. They have limited social experience, which often depends on a third party	• Do not involve under 5 years old children in FGDs as they are too young to express themselves in a group. Use individual interviews, with the presence of a parent or a caregiver or someone familiar, or resort to alternative participatory techniques.
Middle childhood	
• **Language:** A child aged less than 9 years will be able to "manage" 2,600 words, vs 5,000 at 9 years and 10,000 for an adult	• Keep sentences simple • Further structure your interview
• Children in middle childhood (7-12 years) cannot cope with **ambiguity** at all and may not handle **negations**	• Discussion topic must be very specific and clear. Ensure that they are consistently understood by all. • Avoid negative questions.
• **Memory**: from around the age of 8 years, children can start recalling and expressing personal experience that they think could be relevant to feed into the conversation. Memory of children (capacity and constructive process) is not fully grown before 11 years.	• Be careful asking young children to recall experience. Do refer to recent event only. Avoid referring to time references such as "the past two weeks" or "last year", as it will be too abstract for children. Use references such as "since the Monsoon season started…"
• "**Social desirability bias**: Early middle childhood (7-10 years) extremely sensitive to slightest suggestion. "children as old as 8 years will assume that the adult knows everything already. In addition, they are afraid to say something wrong or foolish, especially in a situation that resembles school". Children between 6 and 11 years will remain impressionable, especially by adults and elders (HI, 2016)	• Test questions. Avoid giving examples. Remain neutral, build trust. • Confirm responses by reformulating, repeating answers, by asking another question on the same subject, a little differently, or by asking the child to keep going, to share a concrete example
• Children often have a rich and **vivid imagination**; and think-aloud is very common. **Sensitivity** is not an issue in early middle childhood (7-10 years)	• Sit on the floor next to the children. Try to break power relationship. • Build trust, properly explain objectives, use engaging moderation techniques. • Use exercises and dynamics to trigger and manage interactions
Adolescence	
• Young adolescent (12-16 years) still experience major problems with **ambiguity**.	• Avoid negative questions
• **Abstraction:** Processing speed comparable to adults after early adolescence (15-16 years). Youth between 12 and 17 years of age are able to formulate complex ideas, thoughts about the future, and think about more abstract concepts.	• Focus group is a suitable method for the 12-17 years. The children of that age will be more relaxed and collective interview are more fun and reassuring than individual interview • Be aware of the way that pressure to conform influences the process.
• **Social Desirability**, **sensitivity** becomes more of an issue in later middle childhood (10-12 years), approval	• Try to separate close friends to mitigate mutual influence and encourage youth to open up and speak freely. A group of children / youth who

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[25] Adatpted from:
De Leeuw, E. (2011) Improving data quality when surveying children and adolescents: cognitive and social development and its Role in Questionnaire Construction and Pretesting, Naantali. (available here)
Brus, A., (2017) How to conduct a qualitative and quantitative study? From planning to using findings. Humanity & Inclusion, Lyon.

Age groups and cognitive capacity	Implication
seeking become an issue. **Peer compliance** peaks between age 11 and 13 years.	know each other may be an advantage but also a disadvantage as norms, communication patters and power dynamics already established among the group

Appendix 2 – Strategies for dealing with common challenges

Challenge during FGD	How to prevent and react
A child safety issue or a protection concern is disclosed by one participant – either about them or another child.	**Preventive action**: Remember that limits of confidentiality should be discussed before starting. We should make sure that there is someone available who can support if necessary and be aware of how to raise a child protection concern. **How to react**: Exception to confidentiality is that if we are told something that made us concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child we might have to share that information outside the group so that we can make sure the child is helped. HOWEVER, we would discuss this with the concerned child privately after the FGD. We should respond positively, and acknowledge what is said, but not get into discussion about the situation itself in the FGD. If necessary, the child should be taken outside for support (for example if they are upset). NOTE – if the child does not agree to further support, we should liaise with the Child Protection Safeguarding Focal Point as a decision may be necessary to break confidentiality if this is in the child's best interest. 🔍 Tdh Child Safeguarding Policy and Global Code of Conduct

Participants **do not open up** or look bored.
No interaction between participants, only with the facilitator.
	Preventive action: Make sure to explain the objective of the FGD and discuss ground rules before starting, and remind children they have a choice whether or not to participate.
	
	Be prepared with alternatives: material for more interactive activities and a list of probing questions.
	
	How to react: This cause may be a moderation or communication issue. Different strategies can be used to try and 'shift' the energy such as:
	• Adapting vocabulary - may be using unfamiliar concepts and words.
	• Explain the discussion topic in a different way or reorient the question.
	• Try engaging activities, for example:
	  • Introduce an icebreaker or a game
	  • Start with a scenario
	  • Jump to a less sensitive question or the next question
	
	If these strategies do not work, consider closing the FGD. There may be a dynamic or a sensitive issue that you are not aware of. **Better to finish than causing harm,** even if that harm is just making children reluctant to participate in any future discussions or consultations.

One (or several) participants **dominates** or demonstrates **lack of inclusiveness.**	**Preventive action:** Before starting, clarify ground rules including the role that children will play in the interview: *'no teasing or making fun', 'tell me if I don't' understand you or if you do not understand me', 'you can say "x" if you do not want to answer', 'everyone should have a turn to speak'* etc.

Challenge during FGD	How to prevent and react
	How to react: Deal with dominant participants by acknowledging their opinion and soliciting other opinions e.g. *'thank you, what do others think?'* Gently invite contributions from participants who are speaking less, but use easy-to-answer questions to initially get them speaking. Use a different method which may include more children – for example split into groups and ask to discuss together and feedback. Consider conducting follow-on FGDs or interviews (e.g. if only boys speak, consider a FGD with only girls. If children with disabilities don't participate, consider a FGD or interview with only them)
Participants engage in **side conversation** that may or may not be related to the interview topic, distracting attention. Children get **distracted or irritable**,	**Preventive action:** Make sure ground rules cover that we should listen to each other. Plan for movement and games allowing the children to be creative and connected. Movement will keep the children engaged but will also improve response quality. Activities using concrete material provide a shared focus for the children and interviewer, mainly increase verbal productivity.[26] **How to react**: Redirect the participants and restate the question. Try engaging activities, for example: • Introduce an icebreaker or a game • Start with a scenario • Jump to another question
Children **cannot not find their words**	**Preventative action:** Include a range of activities and stimulus for discussion such as pictures, cards etc **How to react:** Be patient and resist the temptation to try to help children too quickly, as this may influence them and compromise the quality of data. Encourage children ('*Try to find other words to tell me what you mean.'*) or propose various solutions to avoid imposing one idea. Keep showing attention and interest through non-verbal communication strategies, and an open and relaxed posture.
One participant suddenly leaves the group, visibly **affected or annoyed**	**Preventive action**: During preparation, prepare messages and clarify roles and responsibilities in case specific issues arise. Ideally have an adult outside of the FGD who can take responsibility for dealing with any situations that arise/supervise children who leave. **How to react**: Pause the FGD. Make sure that there is someone who is supervising the child. If necessary organise an activity with the group so that necessary arrangements can be made to ensure the child is safe and supported.
Conflict arises between participants	**Preventive action**: Explain rules for good communication before the sessions *'if someone interrupts, we will have to stop talking'* and ensure all participants engage in respecting those rules. **How to react:** Explain that there is no right or wrong answer but that everyone should respect each other's opinion. If necessary change the dynamic, for example by introducing small group activities or an energiser. In extreme situations and if all else fails, consider stopping the FGD or asking the participants to leave.
Participants seem to **feel threatened** or affected by what comes out of the conversation.	**Preventive action**: Know the background and experiences of the children and be prepared with key messages and information on issues suspected to be a concern.

[26] Boyle (2017).

Challenge during FGD	How to prevent and react
Serious questions, issues (not necessarily child safety related) are **raised** by the participants, sharing feeling of injustice, powerlessness.	**How to react**: Jump to less sensitive questions. Give necessary advice/information. FGDs can be an excellent opportunity for children to have some orientation, encouragement and learn. Inform project staff so that they can follow up.
The FGD is **interrupted by a non-participant child**	**Preventive action:** Consider the privacy of the location. **How to react:** Pause the FGD and explain need to leave. Do not re-launch until the privacy and safe atmosphere is re-established
An adult (including staff) **comes to observe** or wants to sit in on the session	**Preventive action:** Be clear about objectives and confidentiality and privacy rules with adults and caregivers before the group starts. Explain that you will have to pause if the FGD is interrupted. **How to react:** Pause, explain about confidentiality, and do not re-start until the privacy and safe atmosphere is re-established.

Appendix 3 – Ethical principles for engaging children in FGDs

1) **Participation is safe** : Risks are considered both before and during FGD processes to ensure that children are kept safe.

   - ✓ This includes ensuring that processes **do no harm** / further traumatise children (for example not asking children questions about their abuse in open forums); prevent children from being exposed to risks as a result of their participation (for example be subjected to stigma or discrimination as a result of their involvement); and ensuring their emotional, psychological and physical safety during participation processes.

   - ✓ This also includes careful consideration of **confidentiality and anonymity**, and circumstances in which it is necessary to break confidentiality, such as where abuse is disclosed.

2) **Participation is voluntary,** Consent / assent is always sought both from children and their caregivers (where available). Children know that they can withdraw from FGD processes at any time, without any negative consequences.

3) **Children are informed about the purpose of their participation in FGDs.** The purpose is understood and felt as meaningful and relevant for them. They are made aware of how their views and opinions will be used and any feedback that will be given to them, in order to make an informed decision regarding whether to participate.

4) **The use of FGDs with children is meaningful and necessary.** Careful consideration is always be given as to whether it is relevant and appropriate to conduct FGDs children, and if information is already known and can be found from other sources or if other data collection methods are more appropriate. Where FGDs are conducted with children, the data obtained is used to inform policy and programmes.

5) Participation is **Inclusive and non-discriminatory.** All children, including those who are marginalised, are able to participate equally, and where necessary special measures are in place to ensure that children who are marginalised can participate fully in FGD processes

6) Participation is **developmentally appropriate, gender sensitive and culturally relevant.** Participation **should be an enjoyable and stimulating experience**

7) Participation is ensured by **professionals having the required competencies. They must have the necessary experience and sensitivity to apply** developmentally, age, gender and culturally sensitive processes for children.

8) In all situations the **best of interest of children** is the paramount consideration

Adapted from Tdh (2017),Child Protection Quality Framework.

Appendix 4 - Quality checklist for FGDs
(Adapted from Stephanie Delaney / InFocus)[27]

Planning stage :

Initial desk review done, information gaps and needs clarified.	
The purpose of the data collection exercise clarified as well as the main (research) questions answered identified. The rationale for collecting data is well thought through (i.e. why are we conducting the research – has other research been done previously that can answer the research questions?).	
Use of FGDs is not determined by funding opportunity or donor driven.	
Clear rationale for why FGDs is adequate and appropriate to answer research questions.	
Cost- benefit analysis done, risks for respondents analysed, and ethical considerations addressed .	
Enough time and resources secured for planning and running FGDs, and analysing data.	
FGD format /questions have been piloted.	

Preparation for the FGD:

Arrangements are in place for reporting of CP concerns / follow up support for children if necessary.	
Translator given orientation / preparation on FGD questions, format etc.	
Confirmation that consent given by parents/caregiver/legal guardian.	
Logistical arrangements in place (e.g. refreshments if provided are available, materials needed for activities procured).	
Arrangements for children arriving/leaving in place.	

Before starting FGD itself:

Thank participants for coming and welcome participants to the discussion.	
Give an explanation of focus group and its purposes –e.g. *"to seek the views of those who have XXXXX to be able to identify xxx''*	
Explain the focus group should take approximately x minutes.	
Clarify confidentiality. Notes will be made during focus group, but these will only be used for the production of the report and will not be shared with anyone not involved in producing the report. All information used in the report will be kept confidential.	

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[27] Tdh (2018) CAP+ and M&E Toolkit

Explain any limits of confidentiality – For example '*If we hear something that makes us worried that someone is unsafe we may have to talk to other people to get help, but we will always speak with you about this first….'.*	
If using a tape recorder, explain what it is and why you are using it, e.g. *'we record these sessions because we don't want to miss any of your comments…' The moment you start recording, make this clear.*	
Advise participants that individual feedback will not be given, but that the report on the study will be shared with stakeholders.	
Set the tone. Remind participants that there are no wrong answers, just differing opinions.	
Confirm that participation is voluntary; children can withdraw at any time or decide not to answer a question without any repercussions on current or future services.	
Confirm that participation voluntary and clarify any reimbursement (e.g. expenses, voucher etc.) that will be given (if any).	
Confirm participants agree, and if so make a note of number and genders and any other important information.	

During the FGD:

Try to encourage discussion between participants and the active participation of all involved.	
Prompt if necessary but be wary of giving answers.	
When documenting, make sure not only to record what is said but also dynamics – e.g. does one person dominate, is there disagreement etc.?	
When documenting responses, try to record the exact words in quotation marks (''…..'')	

At the end of the FGD:

Confirm next steps in relation FGD and remind participants that individual feedback will/will not be given.	
Check if can keep materials produced or if children want to take home (take photographs of anything children want to take home).	
Thank participants for their time.	
Make sure children leave in accordance with agreed arrangements,	

Immediately after the FGD:

Take photographs of all materials procured,	
Write up notes as soon as possible and agree accuracy of notes between note-taker (observer) and facilitator.	
Consider if reached saturation? Saturation is reached when no new information is obtained, and/or when new information simply confirms previously collected information. The saturation effect signals the end of data collection.	

| If any child protection concern is raised, indicating that a child may be at risk or is at risk from any kind of abuse, make sure to report concerns in accordance with Tdh Child Safeguarding Policy (i.e. to the CS Focal Point). | |

And the analysis:

FGD notes are organised, stored and securely recorded, in accordance with relevant data protection processes.	
Observation – content analysis is done in an iterative way. Coding process is documented. Codes are tuned into broader categories	
The analysis does not remain at a pure descriptive level, but reaches explanatory and prescriptive levels.	
Risk of analysis bias is acknowledged, bias is managed via adequate mitigation strategies, namely engaging in analysis tasks as a group	
Methodology is documented and limitations are explained.	