

Yemen Food Security and Agriculture Cluster

RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE NOTE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) tool is developed to complement the Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) by gathering community-level qualitative insights on the status of the food security gaps and needs. As a qualitative data collection method, FGDs bring together a selected group of people for in-depth discussions on specific topics including food security, shocks, markets, and livelihoods.

In line with the humanitarian assessment standards and best practices, this FGD can be conducted either as a standalone qualitative method or in combination with household (HH) surveys. When used alone, all FGD questions should be covered to yield valuable insights into community perceptions, priorities, vulnerabilities, and coping mechanisms. However, for a comprehensive and representative understanding of needs, especially when aiming to quantify severity or compare across populations, the RNA FGD is best complemented with the structured HH questionnaire. This mixed-methods approach enhances the reliability and triangulation of findings, ensuring both statistical validity and context-specific depth unless constraints necessitate otherwise.

This guidance note outlines a standardized approach for FSAC partners for conducting FGD tool for Food Security and Livelihood RNA.

2. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Familiarize yourself with the RNA FGD questions, flow, and objectives.

Plan for two to four FGDs per assessment location, considering gender perspective

Conduct FGDs separately for men and women to ensure open discussion.

Coordinate with the community and relevant stakeholders to schedule and select locations for the FGD sessions.

Select an appropriate place (safe, secure, accessible, quiet, ventilated, and private)

Avoid conducting FGDs during market days, religious hours, harvesting times or conflicts time with their daily routines, particularly for female participants.

2.1. PARTICIPANTS:

It is recommended for each FGD to have a minimum of six participants and a maximum of twelve participants.

Ensure vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, marginalized are actively included in FGD discussions.

3. FGD FACILITATION

Ideally, FGDs require an experienced facilitator and note taker to moderate the discussion effectively.

The facilitator and note taker should either be from the local community or understand the community dialect or have a local volunteer to clarify unfamiliar wordings.

Female facilitators should lead female FGDs where appropriate.

Ensure the RNA FGDs are facilitated within 60–90 minutes.

During sessions ensure to:

Explain the purpose of the assessment and how the data will be used.

Obtain consent from the group to participate and permission to take notes before proceeding, highlighting:

Information will remain anonymous and confidential.

Encourage balanced participation by all participants ensuring diverse voices are heard.

Remain attentive to group dynamics and encourage inclusive participation, being mindful of differences in age, gender, and social roles that may influence how individuals express their views.

Use probing questions to clarify vague responses.

Maintain a neutral attitude, simplified tone, avoid expressing opinions or agreeing/disagreeing with participants.

Avoid leading questions and let participants express their views freely.

4. NOTE TAKING CONSIDERATIONS

Use consistent approach and consider using a standardized note-taking template to facilitate the collection of data and document findings.

Ensure detailed and accurate note-taking, capturing key issues and main points, priorities, recommendations, observations, quotes and group consensus.

Summarize main findings at the end with participants for clarification or confirmation.

Order issues or priorities appropriately, (start with most important/pressing points).

5. DO NO HARM & ETHICAL CONDUCT

Never put participants at risk or discomfort during discussion.

Respect local customs and participants' characters, culture, dialect, opinions and privacy at all times.

Ensure robust measures to maintain secure storage of collected data.

Do not promise assistance or aid in return for participation.

6. FGD QUESTIONS IDENTIFICATION

Note: The FGD is complementary with HH interview assessment. Questions marked with asterisks are mandatory if the FGD is conducted alongside the HH interviews. If the FGD is conducted separately, all questions should be asked to ensure comprehensive data collection.

1. DEMOGRAPHY

Question	Guiding note
1.1 What is the estimated population of this community? What is the average family size? *	Only when official data does not exist, ask participants to estimate the total population (How many families/ households live here?). Write what is agreed upon by most group members. Probe for average HH size (number of members)
1.2 Can you describe the main groups of people living in this community? *	Collect general insight about the community's economic structure and livelihood of most groups in the community.
1.5 Was there any movement of people recorded during the past three months? ((if data is available) *	Inquire about the number of displaced HHs, displaced locations and what main reason caused the displacement in the table. If movement was recorded, inquire whether displacement still continues.

2. SHOCKS

Question	Guiding note
2.1 What shocks or crises has your community experienced	Identify shocks/events that have disrupted in the community. Focus on period within 90 days. Shocks can be categorized as follow: Natural or Environmental: Droughts or water scarcity, Flooding or heavy rains, Crop failures/pests/diseases, Soil

recently? When did they occur?	degradation Economic: High inflation, Unemployment, import/export disruption. Health-Related Shocks: Disease outbreaks. Climate Change: Increasing temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns, Changing agricultural seasons Other Shocks: War and Conflict, Displacement
2.2 How severe was the impact of these shocks on the mentioned groups in the community? *	Clarify which groups are most affected and discuss the economical, physical and social impact that affects the food security and livelihood of HHs. Important: probe to identify what specific groups were more vulnerable by the shock (women, children, elderly) It helps to use a scale e.g. low, moderate, high to gauge the perceived severity of impacts.

3. FOOD ACCESS

Question	Guiding note
3.1 What are the common key food access issues in your community? *	Focus on access barriers that people face such as : High food prices, limited local food production, supply chain disruptions, conflict-related displacement, physical constraints, climate shocks, and shortages in humanitarian aid.
3.2 How are HHs in your community currently obtaining food? What are the main sources? Please respond in order of the most common methods you use. *	Guiding options for analysis can include Purchase from local markets Agricultural production (own farm, garden, etc.) Humanitarian food assistance (food aid programs, NGOs) Loan or food from friends and relatives Barter or trade for food
3.3 How has this changed compared to before the shock/ conflict/ a reference time? Please describe the change and the reasons	In case food source changed, identify pre-shock sources and probe what made the alternative sources accessible
3.4 How have food prices changed since the shock/	Understand the variance of food prices by getting the prices of MFB commodities before and after the

conflict/ reference time? Which food has been most affected? *	specified shock. Determine the % by following the below formula ((old price – new price)/ old price) Note and highlight food commodity with the highest and lowest variance and identify the what made such effect.
--	---

4. FOOD AVAILABILITY

Question	Guiding note
4.1 What basic foods are currently available in your community? What foods are unavailable?	Ask participants to list staple foods e.g. grains, vegetables, dairy, legumes, meat. Discuss which food is available and unavailable
4.2. How has food availability changed since the shock/conflict/ reference time? *(During 90 days)	This question focuses on identifying whether food availability has improved, worsened, or remained stable after a referenced time or after a specified shock. Explore about any seasonal changes in food availability.
4.3. Do HHs have food stock? If yes, on average, how long will it last? * (Specify by days or by months)	Assess whether families have food reserves in their HHs and the estimates on how long the food stock can last. Discuss reasons for having or not having food stock, such as economic factors, agricultural practices, or seasonal considerations.

5. COPING MECHANISMS

Question	Guiding note
5.1. What do HHs usually do with limited food access? What strategies are HHs using to cope with the	Example of some coping strategies Rely on less preferred, less expensive food Borrow food or relied on help from friends or relatives Reduce the number of meals eaten per day Reduce portion size of meals withdrawing children from school to save money, debt to buy food. Assess the

food related issues stated above? (Probe: reducing meals, borrowing food, selling assets.... Etc.)	frequency and severity of food-related coping mechanisms. Identify harmful or unsustainable strategies. Determine if households are selling assets or migrating (e.g., selling livestock, selling the house equipment, sending family members to find work) Explore how these coping strategies impact household well-being (e.g., malnutrition among children, loss of future income potential from asset depletion)
--	---

6. LIVELIHOOD

Question	Guiding note
6.1. What are the top five main livelihood activities (source of income) in your location?	Discuss and identify the most five critical livelihood activities in the community, list them starting with the highest priority. Guiding options for analysis can include Agriculture production Livestock and Animal Husbandry Fishing and Aquaculture Small Businesses Remittances Handicrafts Construction and Labor Services (Education, Healthcare, and Hospitality) Bitty Trades.
6.2. Has the livelihood situation changed since the shock/reference time? How has HH income changed? (probe: why?) *	Assess changes in livelihood compared to pre shock or referenced time. Check if specific livelihood activities have declined, increased, or no longer practiced. Compare pre- and post-shock income levels to reveal losses or disruptions. Ensure to explore reasons for the changes to come up with a clear narrative on what changed, how severely, and why to inform programming.
6.3. What are the three most priorities to help restoring and/or improving livelihoods? *	Document the community's top three needs and based on the discussion order the identified needs by their importance priorities. Take note of prioritizations of each group and age (e.g., females prioritizing farming, youth prioritizing work opportunities). Guiding options for analysis can include Economic stabilization and job creation. Promoting Small and Medium Enterprises (SME Reviving key economic sectors: Restoring the agriculture, fishing and livestock. Scaling Up Humanitarian Aid: Immediate humanitarian assistance livelihoods support, such as skills training and job placement programs. Strengthening infrastructure and

reconstruction Climate Resilience Programs. This includes drought-resistant crops, water conservation techniques, and improved land management practices. Reforestation and Environmental Conservation Programs to restore degraded lands and improve soil quality are essential for long-term agricultural sustainability.

7. CROP PRODUCTION (USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IF A PLANNED INTERVENTION MAY INCLUDE AGRICULTURE SUPPORT AND/OR THIS WAS SELECTED IN Q 6.1)

Question	Guiding note
7.1. What are the main crops grown in this community? For consumption? For Sale? *	Gather participants insights on the key crops that contribute to both HH consumption and sale activities or both. Crops may include staples, vegetables and fruit.
7.2. What proportion of households partake in crop farming?	Estimate the percentage of households involved in farming. Identify non-farming households relying on farming indirectly (e.g., casual workers in farming activities, seasonal workers during harvest time).
7.3 In general, what are the main challenges farmers are facing with crop production? (probe: in terms of water, access to inputs (such as quality seeds,, fertilizer) pests, climate change, marketing...etc) *	Encourage the participants to discuss the main agricultural challenges and how regular they are. Use the following categories to guide the discussion: Water issues: availability of irrigating, water scarcity and seasonal variation Access to inputs: cost and availability of seeds, fertilizers and tools. Pests and diseases affecting crops Climate change
7.4 What are the key three priorities to restore or enhance crop production?	Document the community's top three needs and order them based on their importance . Guiding options for analysis can include A. Improve access to "Advisory Service" of the agricultural extension

services. B. Training in Farmer Field School (FFS) and Farmer Business School (FBS) C. Investment in Irrigation, water accessibility and quality seed. D. Enhanced market access strategies E. Provision of quality seeds, fertilizer and agricultural good practices

8. LIVESTOCK: (USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IF A PLANNED INTERVENTION MAY INCLUDE LIVESTOCK SUPPORT AND/OR THIS WAS SELECTED IN Q 6.1)

Question	Guiding note
8.1. What types of livestock do people in this community typically keep? (probe: for what purposes?) *	Guiding options for analysis can include A. Cattle B. Goats C. Poultry D. Sheep If two of three common livestock types are kept, try to draw the percentage of each type. Determine the primary purposes of livestock (e.g., food, income, labor, trade).
8.2. What are the main challenges people are facing with livestock production/ rearing? *	Explore the challenges farmers faced in livestock in both rearing and production purposes, use the following areas to guide the discussion: Diseases and infections, veterinary services, feed and water availability, dry seasons and climate change.
8.3. What are the key priorities/recommendations/ solutions to address these challenges? *	Discuss and record the community's top three needs and order them based on their importance. Guiding options for analysis can include A. Improved access to veterinary services. B. Training in animal husbandry C. Investment in feed and grazing land D. Enhanced market access strategies E. Provision of seeds

9. FISHING OR AQUACULTURE ACTIVITIES: (USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IF A PLANNED INTERVENTION MAY INCLUDE FISHERIES SUPPORT AND/OR THIS WAS SELECTED IN Q 6.1)

Question	Guiding note
9.1. How has the shock/crisis affected fishing activities? (in case of shock occurrence) *	Skip this question if no shock was reported. Use below options to facilitate analysis: Decreased Production Stocks collapsed destruction fishing infrastructure coastline Loss of Livelihoods Reduced Workforce Restricted Access and Safety Risks Increase the cost of essential inputs for fishing Illegal and Unsustainable Fishing (overfishing) Environmental Degradation/pollution. Weak Institutional Capacity.
9.2. What are the key challenges people are facing with fishing? *	Use below options to facilitate the discussion, it is recommended to come up with up to 5 key issues Insecurity and Safety Risks Loss of Boats and Equipment Deterioration of Infrastructure/ports Damage Essential fishing infrastructure High Operating Costs / inputs Limited Access to Fishing Grounds Relying on basic fishing methods Disrupted Markets and Reduced Demand Lack of essential services /lack access to vital services at landing sites weak capacity of government institutions Old equipment and boats/ Damaged Guiding options for analysis can include A. Overfishing and depletion of fish stocks B. Limited access to fishing equipment C. Poor market access and pricing issues D. Environmental challenges (pollution, climate change)
9.3 .What are key three priorities to support fishing activities and fishermen *	Steer the group to think about the three most important support needed to enhance fishing Guiding options for analysis can include A. Provide training in sustainable fishing practices B. Improve access to modern fishing equipment C. Enhance market access through cooperatives D. Implement environmental protection measures

10. MARKET

Question	Guiding note
10.1. What are the local markets for community to get food and other basic needs? (please also mention the markets name and specify their distance in km as well as pertained cost) *	For Questions 10.1 to 10.3: Design a table to organize responses and capture market-related information, Use the following headings to guide the discussion. Type of Market (e.g., Main Market, sub-market, district,) Estimated Distance (km) Transportation cost The capacity of the markets (stable supply of goods- shortages of essential items ..etc) Accessible (yes /No) - by walk, vehicle, bikes. Basic food availability
10.2. How functional are these markets? *	See guiding note above for Questions 10.1 to 10.3.
10.3. Are the basic food items (MFB commodity items, cooking gas... Etc) available in your market currently? *	See guiding note above for Questions 10.1 to 10.3.

Food and livelihood assistance

Question	Guiding note
11.1. Are there any food or livelihood assistance taking place in the area.	Check if food or livelihood support is delivered in the area. Document the modality of the assistance (in-Kind, Cash or Voucher) Clarify the type of assistance (EFA /UCT, ELA, CCT , MB/IGA) Clarify that livelihood assistance includes all type of Livelihoods Assistance (such as distribution of livestock kits, provision of irrigation kits, or solar water pumps for agricultural, seeds distribution, micro-business support and Income-Generating Activities.
11.2. How often do beneficiaries	Ask this if food assistance is delivered in the area. If regular assistance is provided, seek to understand the tenure between each distribution. The facilitator needs to be aware of the differences in activities and their timing. Food Security

receive this type of assistance? *	Assistance: 1 to 6 rounds. Emergency Livelihoods Assistance : One round (if no cash-plus), or in additional to 3 rounds with cash-plus).
11.3. What is the proportion of people receiving food assistance in this district?	Simply get an estimated number of the targeted HHs for food assistance, then multiply it by the total number of community from the answer of question 1.1. No need to ask about the proportion
11.4. What partners undertake food or livelihood assistance?	Ask about the name of organizations and clarify if its IP not. only those who provided FSAC related activities

12. COMMUNITY ASSETS

Question	Guiding note
12.1 What are the most three important communal assets/ infrastructure in the area? (probe: about their condition and if they need to be rehabilitated) ? *	Identify community assets, such as dams, public wells, roads, and water resources. Then, prioritize three of these community assets based on their importance, ranking them from most to least critical lastly ask if natural disaster or conflict shocks the area have had an impact on community assets
12.2 How has the shock/crisis affected these assets?	See guiding note above.
12.4 Have there been any community initiatives to construct or rehabilitate community assets before?	Based on the questions and answers above, clarify if there are any community initiatives to construct or rehabilitate community assets such as: Road rehabilitation Opening water channels Rehabilitating wells or dams Intervention from the government or community leaders to repair the damages others
12.5 How could the community members	Following the above question, if they provided information about initiatives, then ask if there is a role

contribute to rehabilitating these assets? (Probe: how women can contribute and be engaged?)

for all community groups. In the case no initiatives were mentioned in above question, steer the group towards exploring if there are any options for the community to contribute if any initiatives exist, and what the roles of all community groups/members could be.

7. ANALYSIS

Analysis of FGD data requires technical capacity to ensure methodological process and impartial interpretation of qualitative findings. Below are basic steps for analyzing FGD data in Rapid Needs Assessments :

Summarizing and organizing data: compile key discussion points and responses by thematic area.

Identify and label key emerging themes (e.g. high food price, market access barrier..etc).

Note and flag discrepancies between different FGD groups and highlight areas that need further investigation.

Summarizing key findings in relation to FSL needs, vulnerabilities and community priorities.

Analysis methodology

For large and complex analysis, specialized software tools like SPSS, STATA, NVIVO and others should be used to facilitate the process.

Identify the themes of focus in the assessment, this could relay on the sections of the assessment (e.g. Food Accessibility, Food Availability, Livelihood , Community priorities...etc

Apply simplified coding, this includes categorizing responses and quotes under themes and sub-themes. Example:

Theme	code	Example quote
Food Access	High prices, market access cost	Wheat flour price is now 3x higher.

Calculate the frequency of similar phrases to identify trends

Compare FGD results with survey data (if applicable) to validate or contrast findings.

For a detailed overview of qualitative data analysis, refer to (<https://www.unsdglearn.org/courses/qualitative-data-analysis/>).

An example of a simple reported qualitative outcome:

“Across all FGDs, increasing food prices emerged as the primary concern with majority of respondents. Most female respondents reported reduced meal frequency, due to inflation and limited market access”.

8. INFORMATION AND REPORTING

FGD Report Structure

Title Page

Title of the Assessment

Date of the Report

Authors and Contributors

Organization Logo

Executive Summary

Brief overview of key findings and recommendations

Introduction

Background: context of the need assessment (why the assessment was conducted)

Objectives of the assessment

Scope: focus area, target population

Limitations of the assessment

Methodology

Approach Sample size, sampling

Data collection methods

Key Findings

Analysis of food availability, access, utilization

Effects on livelihoods and coping strategies

Vulnerable Groups: Impact on women, children, elderly, and other at-risk populations

Categorized list of gaps/needs/key priority area to support in Agriculture, livestock and Fisheries

Conclusions

Summary of the assessment findings.

Recommendations

Actionable steps to address needs

Prioritization of interventions

Appendices

Questionnaire template

Additional supporting documents and references

9. REPORTING INFORMATION SHARING

Report and share the findings of the RNA with relevant stakeholders, including FSAC, local authorities, NGOs, INGOs, and other humanitarian organizations to ensure coordinated and effective responses. This includes sharing the findings with local authorities, NGOs, and other humanitarian organizations to ensure a coordinated and effective response.

Ensure context-specific methods are adopted for protecting and sharing data. Remember, lack of information sharing can lead to inefficient and poorly-planned programming, the possible duplication of assessments, and, subsequently, assessment fatigue among the affected population

10. REPORTING PRINCIPLES

Be Transparent: Clearly state the limitations of your analysis, methods used, and confidence levels in findings.

Define Key Terms: Use accepted terminology to avoid misunderstandings and reduce jargon.

Gender and Age Impact: Ensure reports reflect the effects on different genders and age groups.

Simplicity: Keep information clear and concise, avoiding repetition while ensuring completeness.

Community Engagement: Share results with affected communities and authorities for accountability.

Highlight Needs: Emphasize distinct needs in briefings to inform evidence-based responses.

Identify Gaps: Clearly state information gaps and needs for further assessments.

Acknowledge Contributions: Give credit to participating stakeholders.

11. KEY REFERENCES

Livelihood Assessment Toolkit