Refugee Reproductive Health Needs Assessment Field Tools
Group Discussion Questions
Introduction

Purpose of the Tool

The purpose of this tool is to help you conduct group discussions to obtain information on consumer/client perceptions of the reproductive health needs in the camp. Group discussions are especially useful in the early stages of program development because the format allows the participants to interact with each other and build on each other's responses. Participants in these discussions evaluate health messages, identify problems and generate solutions.

Data generated by group discussions, however, are only useful to the degree that they reflect clearly defined objectives of a needs assessment. A poorly conceptualized needs assessment may generate a lot of data that have very little value in the end. The need to relate decisions about group discussions to well-defined objectives is a theme that will be repeated throughout this introduction.

Individual interviews will be conducted with refugee leaders prior to the group discussions in order to obtain greater depth of information on these topics, as well as generating community support for open and less censored participation in the group discussions.

Planning for the Group Discussions

The first thing you should do is read one of the books on focus group discussions listed at the end of this introduction. Then you should decide whether group discussions can help achieve the overall objectives of the needs assessment. Once you decide that group discussions are indeed appropriate, then you have a number of additional decisions to make -- many of which will follow from the overall objectives (including definition of relevant target groups). Any advice given to you by the refugee leaders should be given strong consideration -- especially advice regarding logistics and cultural appropriateness of topics.

In planning, you must decide:

- the relevant characteristics of group members
- how many people to recruit into a group
- how many groups
- how to recruit the participants
- who should facilitate and who should take notes
- where to conduct the discussions
- which questions to ask, and if this varies by group
- how long the discussions will last
- how much time you have to complete the data collection process
- who will facilitate the groups
- how data will be recorded
- how data will be analyzed
- how results will be reported and to whom
- how to provide feedback to the participants

Participants
The objectives of the needs assessment should define the relevant participant characteristics. Group discussions should include all various identifiable groups -- probably most easily defined by nationality or ethnicity -- for which reproductive health (RH) services may be developed as a result of the needs assessment. Other characteristics which might be related to specific program design include age and marital status. And, regardless of whether males actually visit clinics for RH services, males also should be interviewed in order for providers to understand their role in decisions to use services. Undoubtedly, RH needs of males themselves will surface in these discussions as well.

The participants within any one group should be as similar to each other as possible to allow for the greatest amount of comfort among the participants in answering questions which will be considered sensitive in nature. At least two group discussions should be conducted for each group representing the relevant combination of categories. For example, if there are two ethnic groups to be served in a camp, there should be two group discussions for each gender of each ethnic group -- that is eight discussions altogether.

	Female	Male
Group A	2	2
Group B	2	2

Every additional dichotomous (two-category) characteristic added (e.g., married vs. unmarried; under 30 years vs. 30 years and older) will double the number of groups. This additional burden must be considered in terms of the potential payoff. Again, this reflects the need to have carefully defined objectives prior to conducting a needs assessment.

Group discussion participants are often recruited through local organizations or through the administrative structure of the camp communities. The local UNHCR and NGO staff can help determine the most feasible way of doing this. Participants should feel that this is a completely voluntary activity and that even after the discussion begins they are free to leave. Whether you should use any kind of incentive or not depends on the situation and your resources. The advice of camp staff will be helpful. At the least, there should be baby-sitting available and food or drink -- perhaps transportation if that is necessary.

The optimal number of participants in any one group is between 8 and 12. Generally, the smaller the group, the more manageable. You might want to recruit a slightly larger number, expecting a few to dropout at the last minute.

The Discussion Guide
A set of discussion questions has been developed for your use, but it should be used as a guide only. The questions asked in any one discussion group should be chosen because of their relevance to the specific objectives of the needs assessment and based on the facilitators knowledge of the current camp situation and cultural

sensitivities regarding specific topics. More detailed questions may be needed for some topics, such as abortion or domestic violence, if those topics are likely to be related to new services provided by the NGO doing the needs assessment.

Once the questions are chosen, they must be translated into the local language by a native speaker and then translated back into English to ensure that everyone is satisfied with the meaning of the question. The exact method chosen for translation will depend on the resources available within the camp. If a native speaker, a member of the refugee community if possible, has the skills to conduct the focus group, this would be ideal. Responses to the discussion questions could be translated into English back from the local language more easily -- retaining all the cultural meanings which could be explained in the debriefing/translation process. If you decide to use an outside facilitator, you may decide to have the questions (and answers) simultaneously translated during the discussion. Once again, this decision will have to be a judgment call based on whatever the tradeoff in resources and quality is determined to be.

The questions should be pilot tested with a group of participants similar to the ones you will be talking to later.

Location
Though you may not have a lot of say in where to conduct the group discussion, it should be held in a location which provides as much privacy as possible, where participants can be comfortable, where respondents are approximately equal distance from the moderator and where it is easy for all participants to have eye contact with each other and hear each other speak.

Conducting the Group Discussion
Once you have a group of participants assembled for the discussion, explain to them what you are going to talk about. Be open and clear. Have a copy of questions to share with anyone who wants to know what you are going to ask. Explain that your intention is that answers will be confidential. If for some reason answers cannot be confidential make sure participants know that.

If you are tape recording the discussion, get permission from the participants first and make sure your equipment works; always carry extra batteries and tapes. If you have a notetaker, introduce that person. Explain that no names are being used.

If the questions are going to be simultaneously translated during the group discussion, remember to plan for extra time for this. None of the discussions should last longer than 1.5 to 2 hours.

The facilitators and translator for each group discussion should be the same gender as the participants.

During the discussion, listen to what people don't say. Let them tell you things you don't ask.

Data Processing and Analysis
After each discussion, the facilitator and notetakers/observers should meet to debrief about what went on in the discussion. Summarize patterns of responses noticed and confirm consensus or conflicts that emerged.

Responses are analyzed by arranging them in the general categories identified in the discussion guide. After the responses are arranged, the different positions or opinions can be identified. Summarize the various opinions and assess the degree to which other members of the group held this opinion. Synthesize any themes or patterns that emerge.

Results from the group discussions should be reported as they reflect the objectives of the needs assessment (and therefore should be reported as one component of the needs assessment process). All the information collected should be relevant to the creation or modification of current services to meet the reproductive health needs of the refugees. Keeping this clear goal in mind should assist the data analyst in organizing the final report.

Feedback and Dissemination
How the results of the group discussions are going to be disseminated to the participant community is something which should be thought through prior to participant recruitment, and may depend on what is acceptable to the local leaders and authorities. Participants recruited through organized groups could also be told of results through these groups as well, though it may be best to discuss findings with local leaders first.

If dissemination to participants is possible (and it should be a goal), then every effort should be made to make the results as easily understood as possible. Qualitative data from group discussions are usually more accessible than data from surveys, but still benefit from thinking through how to be clearly presented.

As stated earlier, the results from the discussions intended to achieve the objectives of the needs assessment should be reported within that framework. They should be used to make decisions about future programs as one part of the needs assessment and not as an end in themselves. It is important to highlight how group discussion findings are consistent or inconsistent with findings from other sources of information.

Additional Resources
Debus Mary. *Methodological Review: A Handbook for Excellence in Focus Group Research.* Academy for Educational Development, HEALTHCOM, Washington, DC, 1986. (Write: BASICS, Information Center, 1600 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22209 or Call 1-703-312-6806/6800 or E-mail tperez@basics.org to request a free copy.)

Krueger Richard. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research.* Palo Alto, CA: Sage Publications, 1988.