



FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS GUIDELINES

Assessment of complex crisis, April 2024

These are guidelines for the focus-group discussion (FGDs) to be conducted as part of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society assessment of the current complex crisis.

Purpose: To understand more about the effects of the complex crisis during 2023 in terms of:

- Past impacts and current consequences for the community.
- Measures that the community has taken to help solve the problems that participants have identified.
- Help that is needed from outside the community.
- Assistance they have received from any agencies during the crisis.

Group composition: The group should be as representative of the local community as possible (to include those with disabilities, marginalised groups, and representing a range of backgrounds, genders, income and livelihoods). The group should be small enough (up to 15 persons) that the discussion can be moderated efficiently.

Moderation and note-taking: A moderator and a note-taker should be present for all groups.

- The moderator is responsible for guiding the discussion and for timekeeping.
- The note-taker is responsible for recording the discussion, using the standard format below.
- Neither the moderator nor the note-taker should participate in the discussion other than to facilitate.
- Different coloured pens should be used on the flip charts to record responses from males and females. Note which colour is used for which gender on the Report Sheet.

Preparations: Ensure that the location is prepared in advance with seating arranged appropriately, and refreshments are available. If possible, meet in an airy indoor space, or meet outside. Bring at least five large sheets of paper, 100 small red circular stickers (for females) and 100 small blue circular stickers (for males). Write out the table used for 'overall conclusions' (page 6) in advance on one of the sheets, translated into local language.

Main topics: The discussion is organised into broad topic areas.

- Health, water and sanitation
- Food security and livelihoods
- Protection, gender and inclusion

Timing: The FDG will continue for two hours. Participants should be encouraged to stay until the conclusion.

Scope of discussion: When we talk about the economic crisis, we mean that the year 2022 is the baseline, and we would like your inputs about how the situation has changed in 2023.



Facilitator's welcome, introduction and instructions to participants (no more than 10 minutes)

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this focus group. You have been asked to participate as your point of view is important. I realise you are busy and I appreciate your time.'

Introduction: 'This focus group discussion is designed to assess your current thoughts and feelings about the difficulties surrounding the economic crisis. There was a previous assessment in 2022, and we are interested in your perceptions of any changes during 2023. The focus group discussion will take no more than two hours.'

Anonymity: 'I would like to assure you that the discussion will be anonymous. The transcribed notes and recordings of the focus group will contain no information that would allow individual persons to be linked to specific statements. You should try to answer and comment as accurately and truthfully as possible. Please refrain from discussing the comments of other group members outside the focus group. If there are any questions or discussions that you do not wish to answer or participate in, you do not have to do so; however please try to answer and be as involved as possible.'

Purpose: Explain the purpose of the discussion (to understand more about the effects of the complex crisis during 2023, as seen by the community members) and how it will be used by the Red Cross, in order to encourage accurate and unbiased answers. Explain that the purpose of the visit is not to provide aid and that the answers that participants provide will not influence this.

Ground rules

- The most important rule is that only one person speaks at a time. Please try to wait to talk until the person speaking has finished.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- You do not have to speak in any particular order.
- When you do have something to say, please do so. There are many of you in the group and it is important that I obtain the views of each of you.
- We will need to keep to time, and cover all topics, so I need to limit some of the discussions.
- You do not have to agree with the views of other people in the group.
- Please keep your mobile phones on silent if possible.
- At the end, if we have time, we can discuss about any issue or topic that you think need more attention.
- Does anyone have any questions?
- OK, let's begin.



Did any of you participate in the previous SLRCS needs assessment FGD in September 2022? (show of hands).

Topic: Food security and livelihoods (no more than 30 minutes)

1. Please consider how has the current crisis has affected your household's access to sufficient nutritious food that meets your food preferences and dietary needs. How have your household's livelihoods have been affected during 2023?

Please give examples of the most important consequences of these changes for you and your family (listed on a flip chart). Take notes of their concerns and the impacts for each example listed, and include this information in the report sheets.

Encourage participants to provide no more than **two** examples each initially (one about food security and one about livelihoods). Several participants may have the same concerns, so no need to record more than once.

2. Ask participants to consider which are the most important problems for the community arising from these examples.
 - a. Participants are given three stickers (red for females, blue for males). Ask each participant which **three** examples listed are the most significant for their community. Each participant should place a sticker against the three issues that they identify as most important to them.
 - b. The moderator or note-taker adds up the scores for each of the listed examples.

Supplementary questions – provide prompts only if needed

1. Consider changes in access to foods, access to markets, fuel, cooking fuel, farming, employment. Who is affected the most? Proportion of people severely affected?
2. Is it common that people in the community have had to take on more debt since January 2023? Do you think they will be able to repay their debts?
3. Do you think your community is earning less in 2023 compared to 2022? What are the main barriers to restart/adapt livelihoods in your community?
4. How has nutrition been affected in your community in 2023? Changes in the types of food that are available to people in your community? Are some groups in your community more vulnerable to malnutrition than others (women, pregnant women, young children, persons with disabilities, elderly people)?
5. If there are undernourished people in your community, what do you think are the reasons? Access to food? Awareness about healthy nutrition? What can be done to improve nutrition?

Topic: Health, water and sanitation (no more than 30 minutes)

1. Please give examples of how you and your family's health has been affected by the current crisis. (listed on a flip chart).

Encourage participants to provide no more than **two** examples each initially (one about food security and one about livelihoods). Several participants may have the same concerns, so no need to record more than once.



2. Ask participants to consider which are the most important problems for the community arising from these examples.
 - a. Participants are given three stickers (red for females, blue for males). Ask each participant which **three** examples listed are the most significant for their community. Each participant should place a sticker against the three issues that they identify as most important to them.
 - b. The moderator or note-taker adds up the scores for each of the listed examples.

Supplementary questions – provide prompts only if needed

1. Did the prevailing situation during 2023 affect the health of people in your community, and/or your community's health services?
 - a. Think of the availability of essential drugs, availability of transport (ambulances), scheduling of clinics and opening times, availability of healthcare professionals. Have appointments been postponed?
 - b. Has access to medicines changed in your community in 2023? Think of the cost of medicine, the cost of treatment, and the cost of transport.
 - c. Do you know anyone who gave birth in the last two months? How was their experience affected by the current crisis?
2. Do you think people in the community neglected their own healthcare during 2023 in order to prioritize their children's healthcare?
3. (For women only) Did the crisis impact the availability and affordability of menstrual hygiene products during 2023?
4. How has the crisis affected other hygiene practices in the community during 2023? Access to safe drinking water, water for food preparation, washing and the use of latrines, soap etc.
5. How have other environmental and community health activities been affected in the community during 2023? Think of disposal of garbage, fogging for mosquitos, environmental measures against mosquitos.
6. Have you noticed any emotional or psychological consequences in your community resulting from the crisis during 2023? Are you aware of any mental health changes among community members as a result of the crisis (for example, grief, acute stress reactions, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, worsening pre-existing mental illness)? What about suicide?
7. Have you noticed any changes in drug and alcohol use in the community during 2023? What has changed?

Topic: Protection (no more than 30 minutes)

Protection means addressing violence and keeping people safe from harm.

1. I want you to consider how personal security and safety in your community has changed because of the current crisis during 2023. For example, which groups are most vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion, or violence? How has the current crisis affected these groups?



Please give examples of the most important concerns in these areas that have arisen because of the crisis. Think of your own situation, and that of your family and community. (listed on a flip chart).

Encourage participants to provide no more than **two** examples each initially (one about food security and one about livelihoods). Several participants may have the same concerns, so no need to record more than once.

2. Ask participants to consider which are the most important problems for the community arising from these examples.
 - a. Participants are given three stickers (red for females, blue for males). Ask each participant which **three** examples listed are the most significant for their community. Each participant should place a sticker against the three issues that they identify as most important to them.
 - b. The moderator or note-taker adds up the scores for each of the listed examples.

Supplementary questions – provide prompts only if needed

1. Did the current crisis impact the lives of people living with disabilities in your community during 2023? How are they coping?
2. Who in the community is most at risk of experiencing sexual, gender-based or other violence (such as crime, abuse, or corporal punishment) or discrimination? Think of people from LGBTQ+ communities (translated appropriately into local language), boys, girls, women, men, elderly, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, or any marginalized groups? Did this change during 2023?
3. How did security and safety concerns inside and outside of home change during 2023?
4. How did the availability of services for survivors of sexual, gender-based or other violence and child abuse change in your community/area as a result of the crisis during 2023?
5. How has the crisis affected your children's education during 2023? (transport, stationary, school meals, remote learning etc). If they haven't been going to school or doing their schoolwork, what have they been doing instead? What are the future implications?
6. Do you know of anyone who has moved into or from your community during 2023? (settlement (long-term/permanent stay), employment (including military service), education or training, marriage etc.). Do you know of anyone who is seriously planning to move?
7. Do you think the crisis has led to an increase in commercial sex in your area?

Overall conclusion - after discussion of all topics (no more than 20 minutes).

Review the purpose of the study and ask the participants:

1. Consider all of the themes that have been discussed (food security and livelihoods; health, hygiene and sanitation; and protection) and discuss with the participants:
 - Main practical measures that the community has taken to lessen impacts.
 - Assistance they have received from any agencies during the crisis.
 - Help that is still needed from outside the community.

Note their answers on the flip chart.



2. Did your general expectations change because of this crisis?

Ask each participant (in turn) to assess their expectations on a scale of 1 to 5 (written on the flip chart). Each participant place one sticker against the score that best reflects their expectations.

Score	1	2	3	4	5
2022					
Now					
Expectations	Very negative situation, feeling of desperation	Challenges ahead, some insecurity	Manageable situation, will cope	Opportunities ahead, some security	Very positive situation, feeling of confidence

3. Have we missed anything?
4. If you had a question or a complaint for the Sri Lanka Red Cross (this could be about services provided by SLRCS or a person working for SLRCS) how would you register this?
Provide this information to participants.
5. Thank all the participants and close the discussion.