Appendix IV: Focus group discussion guide

Guidance note for facilitators

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate a focus group discussion. Running an effective focus group is a skill and requires planning. This note is intended to assist you in organizing and conducting focus group discussions with community members to support public health facility Implementation of WHO strategy on integrated, people-centered health services in NMM District, Eastern Cape Province. It is critical that the voices and perspectives of the community be captured and reflected. If you have any questions on the guidance, please do not hesitate to contact us (contact information at end of note). We thank you for being a part of this important work!

I. What are we asking you to do?
We are asking you to facilitate focus group discussions with people from NMM District, Eastern Cape Province who have utilized public health facilities in NMM District within the last 12 months for their health needs. We are hoping to include at least 100 community members in 4-10 focus group discussions.

To make it easier for you to record and share with us your focus group discussions, we offer this Word file with suggested questions and space to summarize responses. You can e-mail it back to us at **** after each focus group discussion. Please note, we would appreciate that you complete one copy of this file for each focus group discussion you facilitate, because that gives a richer range of views than combining multiple focus group discussions into one summary.

We hope you will find the questions pertinent, and we encourage you to guide each focus group to address them, so that we can consistently compare the feedback on the questions across many focus groups. Please note that we are also collecting information from surveys and interviews with patients, providers, and managers.

II. General principles of focus group discussions

Voluntary participation
Community members must agree to participate in the discussion of their own free will. It is essential that participants understand that their participation is voluntary, no quotes are attributed to any specific participant, and there are no consequences to answering specific questions. You should communicate how the views obtained during the discussion will be used in the overall collection and analysis of perspectives for the Regional Consultation.

Confidentiality
The focus group organizers and participants must agree to keep confidential any sensitive personal information that is revealed during discussion, unless the individual in question and the other respondents agree that it is required as part of the feedback.

Participants as Experts
Community members are invited to the focus group because they have the knowledge, experiences and perspectives that we must learn more about. A focus group is not an individual survey about facts and numbers or to determine a majority opinion; instead it aims to bring out a rich experience-based analysis through interaction and a range of views (some common, some divergent).

Let participants know that you are there to learn from them. Expressing this to participants helps to establish a respectful appreciation for valuable contributions that they will make. Use the suggested questions, but let the conversation go its own way for some periods, as long as it’s producing useful inputs per the general thrust of the questions.

Participants: people from NMM District, Eastern Cape Province who have who have utilized public health facilities in NMM District within the last 12 months for their health needs. Ideally participants should reflect a range of ages, both men and women, community leaders and members, older and younger should have a chance to participate
Participant Consent: Participants will sign a consent form to participate in the focus group discussion. One copy of the informed consent form should be given to participants and a second copy should be kept by the focus group facilitator. Participants should be informed if any audio-taping will be used for data collection.

Demographic data: It is important to collect anonymous demographic data from focus group participants. Simple questionnaires for this purpose could be handed out as participants arrive, then collected at the end of the focus group and kept with the tapes of the focus group.

II. How you should organize the focus group discussion?

Select the participants
Identify the most suitable individuals to participate in each group. Be sure that participants are able to address the topics raised in the discussion questions and well positioned to provide valuable insight. Focus group participants should represent the diversity of the larger group about whom we want to learn—for example both men and women, community leaders and members, older and younger should have a chance to participate. The ideal focus group size is between 8 and 20 people, so invite enough to allow for no-shows.

Decide on the time and location
Focus groups normally last about 1.5 hours, although sometimes longer. Plan a time of day that is convenient for the participants and responsive to their life circumstances. Find a location that is convenient and comfortable for participants, quiet, and preferably with some degree of privacy (though practicalities or community culture may point to a common space, and/or perhaps scheduling it alongside some other gathering). It is up to you to judge the situation and decide on the best, most appropriate location. Set the date and reserve the space. Plan some basic refreshments.

Invite the participants
Invite your selected participants as soon as the date and place are set. Contact them the day before the discussion to remind them and re-confirm their participation. Make any necessary last-minute additional invitations.

Familiarize yourself with the questionnaire
The suggested questions have been crafted with the community in mind and to cover certain pertinent topics and issues that should be explored. They are designed to give respondents an opportunity to share their experiences in a fully personal, subjective, qualitative manner and to ensure that the topics relate to the experiences.

Record the discussion
You’ll need a dedicated note-taker, writing or typing. Ideally, focus group discussions will be recorded using both audio recording equipment and the note-taker’s notes (which can be refined later with the help of the audio recording). The hand-written notes should be extensive and accurately reflect the content of the discussion, as well as any salient observations of nonverbal behaviour, such as facial expressions, hand movements, group dynamics, etc. You should assign the note-taker or a third person to monitor the audio recording equipment and keep track of time.

Discussion guides: Please see the Discussion Guide to facilitate structuring the focus group discussion by highlighting the topics that need to be covered. Though it is not to be used rigidly, like a questionnaire. At the focus group discussion, the facilitator encourages participants to explore topics in depth, to reflect, to raise their own issues, etc.

Data collection: The discussions can be audio-taped if agreed by participants, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The recordings need to be securely stored until transcribed and then destroyed. The transcription shall not contain information that would allow individuals to be linked to specific statements. Confidentiality will be strictly preserved, except where disclosure is mandated by a court of law.

Send back the “suggested questions” file with the discussion summary typed in
Once you have completed each focus group discussion, please e-mail the Word file with your discussion summary typed in, to **** by **** so that they can be incorporated into the analysis.
III: Tips for conducting focus group discussions

Explain the principles of focus group discussions (see above)
Make sure participants understand their rights and express their verbal consent; assure them that their identities and individual statements will not be recorded or published.

Establish rapport
Often participants do not know what to expect from focus group discussions, so the facilitator should outline the purpose and format of the discussion at the beginning of the session to set the group at ease. Participants should be told that the discussion is informal, everyone is invited to speak up, and divergent views and debate are welcome.

Follow the suggested questions
The pre-set questions provide a framework for the facilitator to explore, probe, and ask questions. Initiating each topic with a carefully crafted question will help participants share their experiences in a focused and meaningful manner. It also helps us to aggregate and analyze the responses across many focus groups. At the same time, use judgment in allowing the conversation go its own way for some periods, as long as it’s producing useful inputs per the general thrust of the questions. People will be more engaged if they can say what’s on their minds even if it’s somewhat off topic.

How to keep the conversation flowing
A few suggested techniques:
- Repeat the question – repetition gives more time to think.
- Pause for the answer – a thoughtful nod or expectant look can convey that you want a fuller answer.
- Repeat the reply – hearing it again sometimes stimulates conversation
- Ask when, what, where, which, and how questions – they provoke more detailed information
- Use neutral comments – “Anything else?”

Ensure that all focus group members participate
In focus groups, it is not uncommon for a few individuals to dominate the discussion. Sometimes in mixed gender groups, one gender may tend to speak more than the other. To balance participation, and ensure that every participant has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion, you might consider the following strategies:
- Address questions to individuals who are reluctant to talk
- Give nonverbal cues (look in another direction or stop taking notes when an individual talks for an extended period)
- Intervene, politely summarize the point, then refocus the discussion

Minimize pressure to conform to a dominant viewpoint
When an idea is adopted without any general discussion or disagreement, it’s likely that group pressure to conform to a dominant viewpoint has occurred. To minimize this group dynamic, the facilitator should probe for alternative views. For example, the facilitator can raise another issue, or say, “We have had an interesting discussion, but let’s explore other ideas or points of view. Has anyone had a different experience that they wish to share?”

Feedback and getting involved
Participants may be interested to know more about what will be done with the information they provided and/or how other groups in the same or different countries responded. The analysis of people’s inputs will appear in the USAID ASSIST report and will influence the strategies for improvement of health services in NMM District, Eastern Cape Province. The report will be posted on the website as well.

Contacts
USAID ASSIST, South Africa: ****
Focus Group: Consent

Improving integration and people-centeredness of health services

**Sponsoring organizations:**
NMM District, Eastern Cape Province
USAID ASSIST
World Health Organization

**Part I: Information Sheet**

**Aim of the study**
This study aims to understand to what services delivered at public health facilities in NMM District within the last 12 months are integrated and people-centered and in what ways they could be improved to better meet the needs and expectations of people across the life course.

**Voluntary Participation**
You are invited to participate in this study about people-centred and integrated health services. You are invited to participate in a focus group discussion because you have direct experience with health services. Participation in this study is voluntary. Whether or not you participate will have no effect on your relationship with any collaborating institution, your work place or your access to health services.

**Procedures**
If you agree to participate you will be part of a focus group discussion. The topics that will be discussed include your experiences with services and how they could be improved. The focus group discussion will last around one hour.

The focus group will be audio-recorded in order to accurately capture what is said. If you participate in the study, you may request that the recording be paused at any time. You may choose how much or how little you want to speak during the group. You may also choose to leave the focus group at any time.

**Benefits and Risks**
You will not receive any payment for your participation. Participating in this study may not benefit you directly, but it will help us learn about health services and help us to improve them. Because some of the information shared may be personal, you may experience some degree of emotional discomfort. The investigators are available to speak to you should you have any further questions.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**
You may choose to speak as much or as little as you wish. Neither the content of the discussion, the identity nor the affiliation of any other participant should be shared outside the discussion. The information you share with us will be kept confidential after the workshop will be accessible to the researchers only. The audio-recordings and transcripts of the focus groups will be kept on a password-protected computer.

You will be asked to complete a participant profile sheet to inform the research team of the background of respondents. Reports of study findings will not include personally identifiable information. The data will be kept for up to five years after the completion of the study.

**Who to contact**
If you have any questions about this study and this workshop, please contact Linda Ncaca at: 082 6499601.

Your signature on this consent form indicates your agreement to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your reference. The second signed consent form will be kept by the improvement team.

**Part II: Statement of Consent**
I have read the consent form, have been given opportunities to ask questions, and all of my questions about the study have been answered. I understand that the focus group will be recorded. I agree to participate in this study.

Print name: _____________________________________________
Signature:  ______________________________________________
Date: _______________________

ASSIST
Focus Group: Demographic Details

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided, circle or tick the most appropriate options.

1. Age:...................................................................................................................

2. Are you: (please tick as necessary)  □ Male  □ Female

3. What is your ethnicity?

4. What is your education level?

5. What is your income?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire
Facilitator’s welcome, introduction and instructions to participants

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this focus group. You have been asked to participate as your point of view as a patient and community member is important. Your time and input is appreciated.

Introduction: This focus group discussion is designed to better understand your thoughts and feelings about health care you received in public health facilities in NMM District within the last 12 months. The focus group discussion will take no more than two hours. May I tape the discussion to facilitate its recollection? (If yes, switch on the recorder)

Anonymity: Despite being taped, I would like to assure you that the discussion will be anonymous. The tapes will be kept safely in a locked facility until they are transcribed word for word, then they will be destroyed. The transcribed notes of the focus group will contain no information that would allow individual subjects to be linked to specific statements. You should try to answer and comment as accurately and truthfully as possible. I and the other focus group participants would appreciate it if you would 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.

Consent: Please assure that you have completed a consent form. One copy of the informed consent form should be given to me and you should keep the second copy for your records.

Demographic Details: Please also complete a copy of the demographic details questionnaire which provides us with a little more information about you.

Ground rules

- The most important rule is that only one person speaks at a time. There may be a temptation to jump in when someone is talking but please wait until they have 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 hear everyone’s views.
- You do not have to agree with the views of other people in the group.
- Does anyone have any questions? (answers).
- OK, let’s begin

Warm up

- First, I’d like everyone to introduce themselves. Can you tell us your name and something about you?

Introductory question

I would like you to take a couple of minutes to think about your experience receiving care at a public health facility in NMM District. Would anyone share his or her experience?

Guiding questions

- What are the attitudes of staff and providers towards you? (What did people think/say/do?)
- How did the staff and doctors and nurses or community health workers communicate with you?
- How were you respected or disrespected during your visit?
- How involved were you with the decisions about your care? In what ways did that meet or fail to meet your expectations?
- Do you think that people in the community trust and use the clinic? Why or why not?
- How would you improve the clinic and your experience there?
- How would you like your family or friends to be involved in your care?
- What ways does the community support patients?
- What services provided by community health workers are helpful? What parts are not helpful?
• How would you describe the relationship you have with the providers at the facility?
• Have you had trouble accessing services when you needed them? How could this be improved?
• How could the facility better support you in caring for your conditions at during your daily life?
• Would you recommend using the health facility to your family and friends? Why or why not?
• Do you have community representatives who help make decisions at the clinic? Are they able to influence decisions? Why or why not?
• In what ways are you able to influence the services provided at the health facility? Does the community have an active role in planning or designing services?

Concluding question
• Of all the things we’ve discussed today, what would you say are the most important issues you would like to improve at your local facility?

Conclusion
• Thank you for participating. This has been a very successful discussion
• Your opinions will be a valuable asset to the study and to improvement efforts.
• We hope you have found the discussion interesting
• If there is anything you are unhappy with or wish to complain about, please contact ***** or speak to me later
• I would like to remind you that any comments featuring in this report will be anonymous
• Before you leave, please hand in your completed personal details questionnaire

Please, write your report based on the results of the focus group. Please remember to maintain confidentiality of the participating individuals by not disclosing their names.
Focus Group: Report

1. Introductory question

I would like you to take a couple of minutes to think about your experience receiving care at a public health facility in NMM District. Would anyone share his or her experience?

Guiding questions

2. What are the attitudes of staff and providers towards you? (What did people think/say/do?)

3. How did the staff and doctors and nurses or community health workers communicate with you?

4. How were you respected or disrespected during your visit?
5. How involved were you with the decisions about your care? In what ways did that meet or fail to meet your expectations?

6. Do you think that people in the community trust and use the clinic? Why or why not?

7. How would you improve the clinic and your experience there?

8. How would you like your family or friends to be involved in your care?

9. What ways does the community support patients?
10. What services provided by community health workers are helpful? What parts are not helpful?

11. How would you describe the relationship you have with the providers at the facility?

12. Have you had trouble accessing services when you needed them? How could this be improved?

13. How could the facility better support you in caring for your conditions at during your daily life?

14. Would you recommend using the health facility to your family and friends? Why or why not?
15. Do you have community representatives who help make decisions at the clinic? Are they able to influence decisions? Why or why not?

16. In what ways are you able to influence the services provided at the health facility? Does the community have an active role in planning or designing services?

Concluding question
17. Of all the things we've discussed today, what would you say are the most important issues you would like to improve at your local facility?