

# MTN-003D Stage 2 Focus Group Discussion Skills

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# What are Focus Groups?

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- ❑ Used in health research in the last 20 years
- ❑ Involve engaging small groups who are similar in some way in an informal discussion on a particular topic
- ❑ Facilitator introduces topic for discussion and acts as moderator, keeping the discussion going and encouraging participation
- ❑ In Stage 2 we are interested in adherence to study product during the VOICE trial – to understand the reasons for poor adherence to study product during the trial therefore will be limited to those women identified through PK results as “low adherers”



# Why Focus Groups?

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- ❑ Group dialogue yields rich information, as participants' insights tend to “trigger” the sharing of ideas / personal experiences – a dynamic not present in individual interviews
- ❑ Provides information from individuals who are invested in the issue or hold “expert” knowledge on a topic about which little is known to researchers
- ❑ Provides a representation of diverse opinions and ideas
- ❑ Provides a relatively low cost and efficient way to generate a great deal of information



# Limitations of FGDs

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- ❑ Susceptible to facilitator bias
- ❑ Discussion can be sidetracked / dominated by one or few individuals
- ❑ Generate important information but limited generalisability to the whole population
- ❑ People might be reluctant to disclose personal behaviour / practices

# How Many FGDs will be Conducted?

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Per Country

2 FGDs x Gel Arm

2 FGDs x Tablet Arm

**\*\*Approximately 6  
participants per FGD**



# The FGD Facilitator

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Qualities of a good facilitator?

- Active listener
- Professional (good balance between formal and informal)
- Has good observational skills
- Has good speaking skills
- Can remain impartial / neutral
- Sensitive to gender / cultural issues
- Sensitive to differences in power among and within groups
- Able to encourage participation of those reluctant to speak
- Can manage those who tend to dominate the discussion

*Which of these are common to both IDI and FGD interviewers?*

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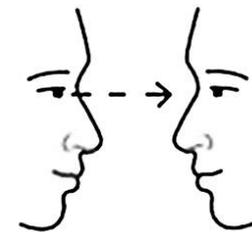
**\*\* Different**

# Listening Skills

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Key to conducting FGDs that will yield “useful” information

- Be an interested listener – pay attention to what is being shared, stay neutral / impartial and practice appropriate silence
- Active listening allows you to probe effectively and at appropriate points during the discussion
- Hearing not only what is being said but noting the body language which provides cues for probing
- Show that you are listening – nod, lean forward, eye contact, verbal encouragement



# Neutrality

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- ❑ Important to remain as neutral / impartial as much as possible
- ❑ May be difficult if you have strong opinions about an issue
- ❑ Rather use neutral phrases such as *“Thank you, that is very helpful”*, *“Does anyone have a different opinion”*?
- ❑ **Instead of** *“I can’t believe it!”*, *“You really think that?”* – these infer your opinion and impose judgment on the participant

Q: How do you think the F should react / respond if one of the ppts say the above to another ppt?

Q: Can you think of other ways to respond when you have a different opinion to the participant?

# Probing for clarification

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- ❑ To **clarify** what a respondent has said; and to give **more detailed information** on the topic
- ❑ Some examples of good probes: *“Please can you tell me more about...? Could you explain what you mean by...? Can you tell me something else about...”*
- ❑ DON’ T say: *“So you are telling me that..., right?”*
- ❑ DO NOT **interrupt**: If you have to probe on something make a mental note of it and ask when the participant is finished talking
- ❑ TRY NOT to **finish their thought / make assumptions** – this may influence how they answer the question or lead to them not answering the question

# Role of the Note-taker

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- ❑ Responsible for recording the FGD - recording equipment and taking extensive notes
- ❑ Make sure equipment is working ahead of time,
- ❑ Bring extra batteries, extra pens, lots of paper, flip-chart, markers and tape
- ❑ Writes ground-rules on the flipchart
- ❑ Assists facilitator in arranging the room
- ❑ Hand-written notes reflecting content of the FGD as well as other salient observations e.g., facial expressions, gestures, laughter, etc.
- ❑ After FGD, review notes with facilitator – capture any insights that emerge from this discussion
- ❑ Can also play the role of time-keeper



# Effective Note-takers

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- Good listening skills
- Good observation skills
- Good writing skills
- Able to take comprehensive notes but not word-for-word
- Act as observer not participant
- Can remain impartial (not give his / her opinion on topics)



# Planning a FGD

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## Before the day:

1. Select the team – Facilitator & Note-taker
2. Decide on the time and location – usually about **1hr-1.5hr (actual discussion)**, time and location convenient for all, refreshments?
3. Confirm venue
4. Check on the supplies (batteries, recorder, pens, reimbursement, etc.)
5. Familiarise yourself with the FGD guide



# Planning a FGD

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## On the day:

1. Arrange the room – ideally seats arranged in a circle, NT away from the group but close enough to hear
2. Verify participants' status (PK results & study product group)
3. Greet participants and offer refreshments
4. Complete procedures as outlined on the individual participant visit checklist
5. Establish ground rules, establish rapport
6. Follow the FGD guide – stick as closely as possible to the guide
7. Thank the participants and reimburse

## Post-FGD (immediately after):

1. Check audio to make sure discussion was recorded properly
2. Expand notes and complete debriefing report

# Setting the Ground Rules

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- Important to establish ground rules at the beginning:
  - One person talks at a time
  - Confidentiality
  - No right or wrong answers – all are valuable
  - Important to hear all sides – both positive and negative
  - No side conversations
  - *Any others?*
  
- Should be presented to the group – visible throughout

# Building Rapport

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*“establishing a connection with participants that facilitates comfortable and open communication..”*

- ❑ can dramatically influence the willingness of participants to open up and honestly answer questions they are asked.
- ❑ Participants are **“experts”**: Let them know you are here to learn from them. This helps to establish a respectful appreciation for their valuable contributions
- ❑ Familiarity with community and sensitive topics: – this is important so that you do not offend / insult unknowingly / unintentionally
- ❑ **Question: *What are some of the issues that may be sensitive issues in the communities we are going to be doing this research?***



# QUESTIONS?

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