

## TOOL 1

# FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE – ASSESSMENT

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in Emergencies / IFRC / Pilot version

## OVERVIEW

This tool provides example questions for a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with women and adolescent girls to understand menstrual hygiene management practices, preferences, social-cultural beliefs and restrictions and health.

The questions include the key things you should assess around MHM in a humanitarian context. The questions should be adapted so they are appropriate and context specific. Introduction/background, consent, ice-breaker and probing questions should be added.

### Important details:

- **FGDs should be age-disaggregated**, for example 12 to 18 years, 19 to 35 years, and 36 to 55 years.
- The number of FGDs to be held depends on the scale, geographical spread, time available and context. It is recommended to have **at least 2 FGDs with each age group**; if operation or programme is larger then more may be needed.
- See Section 3 of the Guide for more information on selecting volunteers for MHM activities.

Depending on how much time and resources you have, these questions can be integrated as part of other activities (for example, asked as part of a FGD on hygiene promotion, PGI or health) – or a separate FGD just for MHM can be held.

## EXAMPLE FGD QUESTIONS

### A. Menstrual hygiene information

- Where do you get information about women's health and menstruation?
- Who do you feel most comfortable to talk with about your menstrual hygiene?
- At what age do women in this community normally start to get their period [menarche] and finish getting their period [menopause]?
- [*For adolescent girls*] Did anyone tell you about what it means to get your monthly period, or how to manage it?

### B. Menstrual hygiene practices and WASH facilities

- Before this emergency/event, what did you normally use to manage your period? Where did you get it from (e.g. purchased from shop, made at home etc.). What was the cost?
- What do you use now to manage your monthly period? [*After this emergency/event*]
- Where do you change your cloth / materials / pads? How often do you change the cloth or pad?
- *If disposable pads*: Where do you dispose of or throw used pads? Why? Probe on challenges, beliefs, if they do it at night etc.

- *If cloth or washable pads:* Where and how do you wash the cloth? Why? Probe on challenges, including with bloody wastewater etc.
- *If cloth or washable pads:* Where and how do you dry the cloth? Why? Probe on challenges, including with privacy, taboos etc.
- *If cloth or washable pads:* Once it is worn out, where do you dispose of or throw the old cloth? Why? Probe on challenges, beliefs, if they do it at night etc.
- What changes or improvements would you make to WASH facilities here, so that you can better manage your menstruation?

### C. **Health, socio-cultural aspects**

- During your last monthly period, did you experience any pain (before or during), itching or irritation? Any discharge or smell? How did you deal with this?
- During your last monthly period, did you feel embarrassed or anxious at all? Why? What could help you to feel less embarrassed or anxious?
- What are the beliefs or customs with menstruation in your culture/community? How do they affect you?
- Is there anything that you are restricted from or can't do during your period?
- What do men (and boys) know and think about menstruation here?
- What information about your body would you like to know?

### D. **MHM Items – *\*\*\*pass around sample items when you ask the questions\*\*\****

- [Pads: Disposable or Reusable]: Have you ever used these items before? Do you like them? Why or why not?
- Which type of pad would you prefer now? Why? (*Discuss aspects of sustainability / reuse (how long the types of pads last), washing, drying, privacy issues, access to water etc.*)  
*Discuss preferences for:*
- [Disposable pads]: With or without wings? Level of absorbency?
- [Cloth or reusable pads]: Colour? Type of material? How many needed per day (or per menstrual period)? Fasted in underwear or using elastic band around waist?
- [Underwear]: Colour? Size? Style?
- [Soap]: Smell/fragrance or unscented? Preferred brand or colour? Bar or powder laundry soap?
- [Rope, pegs or drying rack]: How would you prefer to dry your pads and underwear? Why?
- Are there any other items or things you are missing to help you manage your menstruation?
- [IEC material]: Do you understand the pictures/\*language on this paper? (*\*If already translated to local language*). Can you explain what they mean?

### E. **Distribution of items**

- Have you received any dignity or hygiene items recently (or since the emergency/crises)? Which ones? Were they useful? Why or why not?
- [If yes]: Did you feel safe or embarrassed during the distribution? Why or why not?

- How do you think menstrual hygiene items should be distributed? How would you prefer the distribution to happen?
- Are some women and girls unable to go to distributions? Why? What restricts them?
- *[If planning to use cash assistance]*: Do you think vouchers for menstrual hygiene items is a good idea here? Why or why not? Do you feel comfortable purchasing personal items from the local market/ shopkeepers? How far would you have to travel to the market? Is there anything that could prevent you from using the voucher for menstrual hygiene (e.g. pads)?

F. **Closing**

- What are the main challenges you face in managing your monthly period now? If there are many, get women and girls to vote (by show of hands) or rank them in order of importance.
- Is there anything else you would like to share about MHM or your experiences?
- Do you have any questions?

**\*\*\* Thank participants and explain next steps. Make sure they know how they can access support (e.g. about sexual and reproductive health or about sexual and gender based violence) \*\*\***