

WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES:

A TOOLKIT FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S AND GIRLS'
EMPOWERMENT IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS





TOOL 6: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE WITH COMMUNITIES

WHY USE THE WGSS FGD GUIDE WITH COMMUNITIES?

The WGSS FGD Guide with Communities is to be used for discussions with male members from the community, as well as community leaders (both male and female). The Guide includes questions that provide information on key decision-makers who can influence women's and girls' access to the WGSS, and factors which they determine as enablers or barriers to such access. Answers to these questions will guide the design of [outreach strategies](#) and information sessions necessary to secure and maintain the [buy-in](#) of men and community leaders.

KII and FGDs are assessment methodologies that can be used for various type of consultations. The tools provided in [Part 2: Assessment](#) are useful for the assessment phase because they help gather information needed to establish a new safe space or to renew an existing program.

Managers should be involved in reviewing the questions of the KII and FGD questionnaire prior to the activity to ensure it targets gathering relevant information and will not create a sense of frustration among participants.

HOW TO USE THE WGSS FGD GUIDE WITH COMMUNITIES?

Step 1: Establish the parameters of the FGD

- Men from the community who are not considered leaders should be interviewed in separate groups from those who are community leaders. Female and male community leaders should also be interviewed separately.
- FGD should not include more than 10 participants; the ideal number is 6-8 individuals to ensure everyone can contribute to the conversation. The activity should not last longer than 60 minutes, especially for older participants and people with intellectual and physical disabilities.
- Before mobilizing participants, meet with community leaders and/or local government to explain the purpose of the assessment activity – i.e. to potentially establish a WGSS. They might be helpful in reaching out to the various community leaders you should specifically be consulting with through this FGD. Also consider asking women and girls which community leaders should be involved in this discussion.
- Both community leaders as well as women and girls consulted in other assessment steps can support the identification of male community members who can participate in this FGD.
- Some questions may be considered probing by respondents (e.g. when the respondent cannot think of a response after some time) and should only be asked if necessary. It is not necessary to use each probing question – they are meant merely as examples to stimulate a more detailed response.

- Remember accountability – you will need to share the assessment findings with the FGD participants. It is important therefore to think of three-to-five points that would be worth feeding back to the groups you spoke with. Ask them during the FGD how they would like the information to be shared back with them acknowledging their time concerns, and that the conversation might be short.
- Remember that some community leaders may have a strong reaction to the idea of a program targeting women and girls. Prior to using the WGSS FGD Guide with Communities, make sure you have identified what can potentially be critical issues and sensitive topics and be prepared to address them, while maintaining a positive and constructive environment. This preparation should be supervised by managers or should be a team effort. Remember that ultimately, one of the objectives of engaging community leaders is to encourage their acceptance of the WGSS.

Step 2: Facilitate the WGSS FGD Guide with Communities

Remember that not all questions need to be asked, rather select the questions most relevant to your assessment. The decision of what questions will be asked should be taken either by the manager or it should be a WGSS team decision.

To fully moderate the conversation:

- The facilitator should not take notes; instead, a note taker should be present.
- The sex of the facilitator will depend on the sex of the participants. If the FGD takes place in a traditional society and participants are male community leaders, a male facilitator may be necessary.
- If the FGD is conducted with female community leaders, a female facilitator is required.
- If Sign Language interpreters support facilitation, the FGD guide should be shared in advance so they are familiar with the questions that will be asked.
- If translation is needed, translation of sensitive or technical concepts and words should be previously discussed, identified and agreed.

Before conducting an FGD, it is important always to get the consent of participants. It does not need to be written, in many contexts verbal consent is enough. Before starting an FGD, the facilitator should reassure participants that the interview will be anonymous and only non-identifiable information will be captured. All participants should agree that no information shared in the discussion will be divulged outside the group.

Step 3: Decide how best to link the WGSS FGD Guide with communities with other assessment tools

Information collected through other assessment tools can be used as a starting point for the FGD, providing you an opportunity to triangulate or delve more in-depth on certain questions or approaches. For example, when looking at the [Tool 7: WGSS Community Mapping](#) you can:

- ✓ Consider using the same group formations of participants for both activities.
- ✓ It is recommended to conduct the WGSS FGD Guide with Communities and WGSS Community Mapping in a short period of time, to ensure that information gathered through both tools can be combined and analyzed as complementary.

- ✓ The WGSS FGD Guide with Communities and WGSS Community Mapping may be simultaneously conducted. In this case, a careful selection of questions should be made, and the whole activity should not last more than 90 minutes.
- ✓ In the WGSS FGD Guide with Communities questions 2, 3 and 6 there is the option of incorporating [Tool 7: WGSS Community Mapping](#).
- ✓ If there is time and possibility, it is advisable to conduct the WGSS FGD Guide with Communities and WGSS Community Mapping separately to avoid overwhelming the informant/participant, and so you need not drastically shorten the questionnaires. In that case, WGSS community mapping should be done after conducting initial WGSS FGD Guide with Communities.
- ✓ The information provided by community members could be triangulated with those provided by women and girls. For example, men and women may have a different perception of spaces available for women, or the freedom of movement of women and girls. The facilitator should select probing questions based on the type of triangulation that might be needed.

Step 4: Analyze the findings of the FGD with Communities.

The FGD Guide should be used in parallel to [Tool 7: WGSS Community Mapping](#) with men and community leaders and the findings of both should be analyzed together. For further analysis, both the FGD Guide with Communities can also be analyzed jointly with [Tool 4: WGSS FGD Guide with Women and Girls](#) to see whether information provided by women and girls is like the information shared by community members. The information collected should be entered into [Database A: WGSS Qualitative Assessment](#) to ease the analysis of information and inform programming decisions.



TOOL'S TEMPLATE

Note to Facilitator: This tool is for use during Focus Group Discussions to inform the assessment for the design of the WGSS. Before using the tool, it is important to read [Part 2: Assessment](#). To analyze the information gathered through the FGD, please refer to the annotated version of the FGD guide provided after the blank template in this document.

This sample tool was specifically designed for the following women, men, community leaders and local authorities. Participants in an FGD should not include more than 10 to 12 participants; the ideal number is 8-9 to ensure each can fully share their experiences and contribute to the conversation.

Participants should be placed in identity groups such as the same gender, same status (i.e. host community members, refugees, internally displaced persons), and same role (community members, community leader, etc.)

Remember that not all questions need to be asked, rather select the questions most relevant to your assessment. The decision of what questions will be asked should be taken either by the manager or it should be a WGSS team decision.

During the FGD, probes will be chosen based on the information gathered. (for example: question 4: “Are there restrictions on the time of day, or other requirements for when and how women / adolescent girls can go to these places?” If the answer to this question is “No, there is no restriction. Women can freely and independently move and walk anywhere at anytime” the facilitator will decide not to probe further or may drastically reduce the number of follow-up questions.

To fully moderate the conversation, the facilitator should not take notes- a note taker should be present (unless the conversation is recorded). If the FGD targets specifically women and girls, the facilitator, note taker and translation support should be female. If the participants are male, it is ok to have male personnel involved in the facilitation, in some traditional societies it can be convenient.

Remember, you must always get consent prior to involving someone in information collection.

Group interviews take time; especially at the beginning WGSS may be not understood (or misunderstood). Some of these questions are sensitive; you should review ethical considerations prior to the interview, particularly considering the security of both parties.

If translation is needed, sensitive words and concepts should be discussed prior to the FGD with WGSS colleagues to identify how to translate them into the local language. Finding proper translation of sensitive concepts or terms should always be a result of a group effort.

Focus Group Discussion date: _____

Name of moderator: _____ Name of note taker: _____

Translation necessary for the FGD: ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, the translation was from _____(language) to
_____(language)

Identity marker used for grouping: _____

Age range of respondents: _____

Sex of FGD participants: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Role in the community: ☐ Community leaders ☐ Community Members

INTRODUCTION SCRIPT:

Welcome and Thank you for taking the time to join me for this discussion today. My name is _____, and I'm here on behalf of _____ (organization), as _____ (position). I will be the moderator for this discussion. My colleague _____ will be the note taker.

My organization and I are assessing needs and analyzing the opportunity for programming in _____ (specific location). I am conducting a series of group discussions to learn from different community members about community dynamics, services available, safety and security concerns and/or different types of barriers and violence affecting the community with a focus on women's and girls' experiences. Your answers will help me to understand whether and how to establish (or renew) a Women and Girls Safe Space.

A safe space _____ (add the local name for your WGSS or the term used in general in the setting) is "a structured place where women and girls' physical and emotional safety is respected and where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment to seek, share, and obtain information, access services, express themselves, enhance psychosocial well-being, and more fully realize their rights. In this sense, safe spaces can be a key means of building women's and girls' social assets.

INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT:

If you agree to participate, you will participate in a discussion lasting about 60 minutes. If you do not want to continue participation for any reason, you can leave at any time. Participation in the discussion is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. I will not ask you why you do not want to participate. No negative consequences will occur if you choose not to participate or withdraw at any point.

I will take precautions to keep any information you provide during the discussion confidential. The discussion will take place in a private space so that no one can overhear us talking. If someone approaches us, we will stop the conversation until we can continue in private. I will not present any other identifying information in anything that we produce based on this conversation. I will treat everything that you say today with respect and will only share the answers you give as general answers combined with those from all the people who speak to us. I ask that you keep everything confidential, too and that you avoid using each other's name throughout the conversation, so we can maintain that confidentiality.
With your permission, (select applicable mechanism)

1. I will take notes to make sure that I do not miss what you have to say but will not capture any identifying information. Do you agree with me taking notes from our discussion?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. I would like to audio-record the interview so that I don't miss anything. I will record your responses using survey software on a tablet / phone. The information in the tablet / phone will be downloaded to a secure computer. At no time will the information from the tablet be linked to your name or other identifying information. The audio recorder, which records your voice, will be taken to a secure room, which will be locked and only accessible to the research team. All the recordings will be transcribed and saved as computer files and then the audio files with your voice will be destroyed. Do you agree with me recording your responses?

☐ Yes ☐ No

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #1

First, we would like to start by asking you what are the different identity groups (including any diversity, minority and coexisting heterogeneous groups) of women / adolescent girls in this community?

Are there women / adolescent girls who might be isolated in their homes, or women and girls with more “hidden” identities? Do women / adolescent girls have identities that are different from men / adolescent boys?

Probes:

- In thinking about all the different identities we just spoke about, are they the same or different than those men and boys have?
- If they are different, why is that? If they are the same identities for women and men, does the community interact similarly or differently with women and men with these identities?

Record of the Discussion:

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #2

In this community, where do women go to meet other women? Where do adolescent girls go to meet other adolescent girls?

Probes:

- Are these places only for women / adolescent girls?
- Are these places for all women / adolescent girls?
- What about these places makes it suitable for women / adolescent girls to meet?

Optional: use the community mapping tool

Record of the Discussion:

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #3

What places in this community are considered safe for women and acceptable for them to go to? What places are considered unsafe which women should avoid? (same question to be then asked specific to adolescent girls)

Probes:

- What about the place makes it safe and accessible for women / adolescent girls (e.g. do they need to be accompanied, it depends on how the space is physically structured, depends on the time of day, etc)?
- What about the place makes it harder for some women / adolescent girls to reach or may make them feel unsafe? (e.g. distance, structure, location)
- What about the characteristics or responsibilities of certain women / adolescent girls that make different places safe and acceptable for different women / adolescent girls?
- Would these places be considered safe / acceptable for women / adolescent girls with different disabilities to go to?

Optional: use the community mapping tool

Record of the Discussion:

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #4

Are there restrictions on the time of day, or other requirements for when and how women / adolescent girls can go to these places?

Probes:

- Do women / adolescent girls need to be accompanied during certain times of the day to go to these places? Why? Who decides this?
- Do women / adolescent girls need to be accompanied depending on certain areas in the community where they are going or need to cross through? Why? Who decides this?
- Who should accompany women / adolescent girls?
- Are there women / adolescent girls that are not restricted?
- How does the community react to women and girls who do not follow these restrictions?
- What other strategies can be put in place to facilitate access to places for women and girls?

Record of the Discussion:

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #5

In considering spaces and services that are considered safe and acceptable for women / adolescent girls to go to, how important is it for the space, service to be female-only (meaning for women and girls, only with female staff)?

Probes:

- Would you find it concerning if men from the community entered the space?
- Would you find it concerning if male staff entered the space?
- What might be the advantages of a female-only space?

Record of the Discussion:

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #6

As we mentioned we are looking to establish a WGSS. According to women's and girls' responsibilities where would it be most suitable to locate the WGSS and when might be the most suitable time for the WGSS to provide services and space for women / adolescent girls to meet?

Probes:

- Are these locations for all women/ adolescent girls? In thinking about the identity groups of women we discussed in the beginning would they be different? (e.g. female heads of household, elderly)
- Are these times for all women? In thinking about the identity groups of women we discussed in the beginning would they be different? (e.g. female heads of household, elderly)
- Are these times for all adolescent girls? In thinking about the identity groups of girls we discussed in the beginning would they be different? (e.g. married girls, girls not in school)

Optional: use the community mapping tool

Record of the Discussion:

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #7

In thinking about the decision-makers in the community, what information should a WGSS provide to secure their buy-in for the WGSS? How should a WGSS engage them to provide information about the WGSS?

Probes:

- What type of information should be shared?
- Who should approach the different decision-makers to discuss the new service?
- What processes are helpful to secure community buy-in?
- Do these vary according to the decision-makers?
- Are there certain community leaders who can support this?

Record of the Discussion:

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #8

Finally, before we conclude, based on what you know of WGSS, if you were to talk about the WGSS to another community member to encourage them to allow female family members to attend, what would be your key messages?

Probes:

- What more information about WGSS would you want to have in order to recommended it to another community member?

Record of the Discussion:

CONCLUDING SCRIPT:

Those were all the questions I had for you. Before we conclude, do you have anything you would like to add? Do you have any questions for me?

As I shared in the beginning, your answers combined with those of others will help me to understand whether and how to establish (or renew) a Women and Girls Safe Space.

As agreed I will take precautions to keep any information you provide during the interview confidential. Please remember that you agreed to keep this discussion to yourself. If anyone has questions or would like more information with regards to the assessment, I am happy for you to direct them to me.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!



ANALYSIS: ANNOTATED TOOL

Use the annotated guide below to analyze the findings from your FGD with community members and leaders.

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #1	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p>First, we would like to start by asking you what are the different identity groups (including any diversity, minority and coexisting heterogeneous groups) that women / adolescent girls belong to in this community?</p> <p>Are there women / adolescent girls who might be isolated in their homes, or with more “hidden” identities? Do women / adolescent girls have identities that are different from men / adolescent boys?</p> <p>Follow up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In thinking about all the different identities, we just spoke about, are they the same or different than those that men and boys have?• If they are different, why is that? If they are the same identities for women and men, does the community interact similarly or differently to women and men with these identities?	<p>This question will help identify context-appropriate identity markers (identity includes any minority, diversity, and coexisting diverse groups) as defined by male community members and community leaders, including isolated women and girls, as well as those marginalized and stigmatized by the community (e.g. women and girls with intellectual or mental disabilities, LGBTQ, sex workers, etc).</p> <p>Because this question is also asked to women / adolescent girls the answers can be triangulated. If women and girls mentioned groups not mentioned by men or community members, the facilitator can probe participants on the relevance of these groups.</p>

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #2	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p data-bbox="150 315 707 427">In this community, where do women go to meet other women? Where do adolescent girls go to meet other adolescent girls?</p> <p data-bbox="150 472 252 499">Probes:</p> <ul data-bbox="150 521 743 768" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="150 521 643 589">• Are these places only for women / adolescent girls?<li data-bbox="150 611 616 678">• Are these places for all women / adolescent girls?<li data-bbox="150 701 743 768">• What about these places makes it suitable for women / adolescent girls to meet? <p data-bbox="150 813 702 846"><i>Optional: use the community mapping tool</i></p>	<p data-bbox="829 315 1417 499">Because men and community leaders uphold gender norms, they are likely those in the community who influence where women and girls can meet other women and girls outside of their homes.</p> <p data-bbox="829 544 1434 728">Therefore, norms underpinning where the community considers it appropriate for women and girls to meet will surface in answers asked in a group format to men and community leaders.</p> <p data-bbox="829 772 1431 1160">Answers to this question help inform patterns or trends in key locations which men and community leaders find acceptable for women and adolescent girls to meet at. The answers to this question should be triangulated with the answers women and adolescent girls gave as well. Answers will help inform key considerations for the selection of a location for the WGSS which will receive community buy-in.</p>

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #3	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p>What places in this community are considered safe for women and acceptable for them to go to? What places are considered unsafe, which women should avoid? (same question to be then asked to adolescent girls)</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What about the place makes it safe and accessible for women / adolescent girls (e.g. do they need to be accompanied, depends on how the space is physically structured, depends on the time of day, etc.) • What about the place makes it harder for some women / adolescent girls to reach or may make them feel unsafe? (e.g. distance, structure, location) • What about the characteristics or responsibilities of certain women / adolescent girls, that might make different places safe and acceptable for different women / adolescent girls? • Would these places be considered safe / acceptable for women / adolescent girls with different disabilities to go to? <p><i>Optional: use the community mapping tool</i></p>	<p>This question informs trends and patterns in what determines a place as safe and accessible from men's and community leaders' perspectives. Answers to these questions help inform the key considerations the WGSS should keep in mind during the selection of the WGSS, as well as in the design of key messages for the community for information dissemination about the WGSS.</p> <p>The question also probes men and community leaders on distinctions relative to specific categories of women or adolescent girls to further refine access-related strategies for inclusion and diversity.</p>

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #4	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p>Are there restrictions on the time of day, or other requirements for when and how women / adolescent girls can go to these places?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do women / adolescent girls need to be accompanied during certain times of the day to go to these places? Why? Who decides this? • Do women / adolescent girls need to be accompanied in certain areas in the community depending on where they are going or need to cross through? Why? Who decides this? • Who should accompany women / adolescent girls? • Are there women / adolescent girls that are not restricted? • How does the community react to women and girls who do not follow these restrictions? • What other strategies can be put in place to facilitate access to places for women and girls? 	<p>This question seeks to understand enablers and barriers to women’s and girls’ mobility. Because some barriers might be imposed by unequal gender norms upheld by men and community leaders, it is important to understand restrictions to women’s and girls’ mobility which can affect their access to the WGSS, and how male community members and community leaders frame these restrictions.</p> <p>Answers to these questions can help inform strategies to reduce barriers and restrictions on women’s and adolescent girls’ access to the WGSS. Answers can also help to inform key messages the WGSS program should consider for outreach to those who restrict women’s and girls’ access.</p>

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #5	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p>In assessing spaces and services that are considered safe and acceptable for women / adolescent girls to go to, how important is it for the space, service to be female-only (meaning for women and girls only, and with only female staff)?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you find it concerning if men from the community entered the space? • Would you find it concerning if male staff entered the space? • What might be the advantages of a female-only space? 	<p>Being female-only is a defining element of WGSS, which distinguishes them from other spaces and helps ensure that all women and girls feel safe and comfortable. In many communities, particularly those with strict gender-based norms, the fact that WGSS are female-only increases buy-in from the community for the space and enables women's and girls' access.</p> <p>This question examines how important of a factor this is for male community members and community leaders in considering the space as safe and suitable for women and girls to access. This will then support key messages that can be used in information dissemination to secure buy-in for the WGSS as well as inform staffing and operational considerations.</p>

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #6	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p>As we mentioned, we are looking to establish a WGSS. According to women's and girls' responsibilities, where would it be most suitable to locate the WGSS and when might be the most suitable time for the WGSS to provide services and space for women / adolescent girls to meet?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are these locations for all women/ adolescent girls? In thinking about the identity groups of women we discussed in the beginning would they be different? (e.g. female heads of household, older women) 	<p>Unequal gender norms place many responsibilities on women's and girls' shoulders affording them little free time. In the FGD with women and girls (Tool 4), they are asked to map out in detail their daily activities and responsibilities as well as identify the most suitable time for them to participate in WGSS programming.</p> <p>Here, the question seeks to understand the perspective of male community members and community leaders who place expectations on women's and girls' responsibilities, to get a sense of when women and girls can be 'released' from those responsibilities and access activities and services dedicated to them.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are these times for all women? In thinking about the identity groups of women we discussed in the beginning would they be different? (e.g. female heads of household, older women) • Are these times for all adolescent girls? In thinking about the identity groups of girls we discussed in the beginning would they be different? (e.g. married girls, girls not in school) <p><i>Optional: use the community mapping tool</i></p>	<p>Answers to these questions will reveal not only community perceptions on women's and girls' availability but also indicate if there are discrepancies between times indicated by different participants consulted which can inform further conversations required for the design of the WGSS.</p> <p>This question will also indicate, from the community's perspective, where it might be best to place the WGSS.</p>
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GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #7	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p>In thinking about the decision-makers in the community, what information should a WGSS provide to secure their buy-in for the WGSS? How should a WGSS engage them to provide information about the WGSS?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of information should be shared? • Who should approach the different decision- makers to discuss the new service? • What processes are helpful to secure community buy-in? • Do these vary according to the decision-makers? • Are there certain community leaders who can support this? 	<p>This question seeks information related to designing outreach strategies for key decision-makers to enable support for the WGSS and women's and girls' access. The question is carefully framed – specifically on information and how to disseminate this information – to avoid it turning into a list of services that the WGSS needs to provide men and other community members, which is outside of the scope of the WGSS intervention.</p> <p>Answers to this question should inform the key messages to be framed and created for Information Education Communication materials with key decision-makers identified, as well as how best to disseminate the information.</p>

GUIDING QUESTION & PROBES #8	PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT & DESIGN
<p>Finally, before we conclude, based on what you know of WGSS, if you were to talk about the WGSS to another community member to encourage them to allow female family members to attend, what would be your key messages?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What more information about WGSS would you want to have in order to recommend it to another community member?	<p>Like the question above, this question is framed slightly differently to help flesh out more suggestions to inform the key messages to be created for IEC materials with key decision-makers identified, as well as how best to disseminate the information.</p>