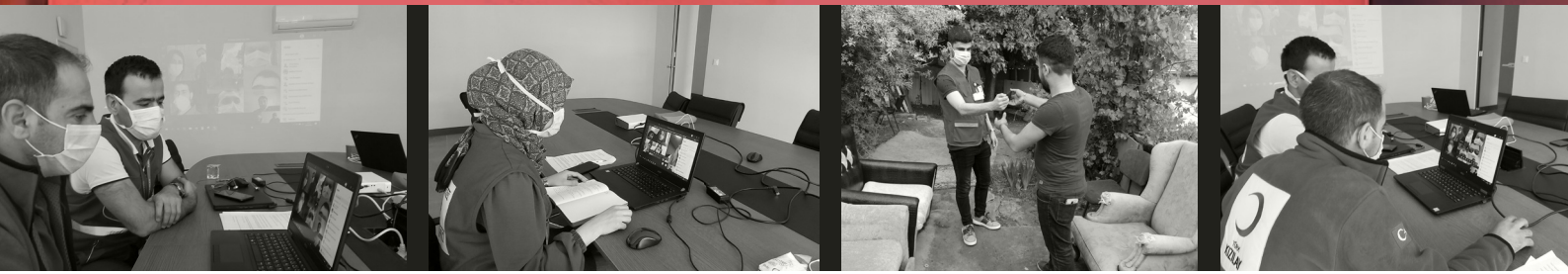


Adapting to New Normal

REMOTE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS DURING COVID-19



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REMOTE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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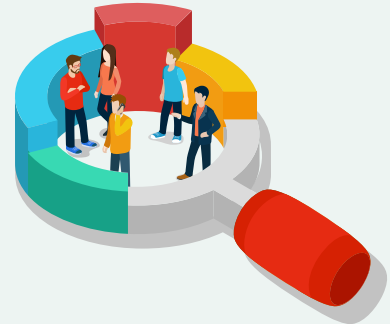


Adapting to New Normal

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) is one of the most important instruments used by Kızılaykart Programmes during monitoring and evaluation of the programs under the Platform, primarily the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Programme implemented in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross - Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) funded by EU Humanitarian Aids (ECHO). Emergency Social Safety Net is providing monthly cash assistance to refugees to meet their basic needs and decrease the use of negative coping strategies by enabling them to gain financial independence. This response aims to enhance their capacities in terms of being more shock-responsive. In line with this, monitoring activities play a key role in demonstrating the improvements in outcomes that are defined based on programme objectives. As part of beneficiary monitoring, focus group discussions are one of the most common instruments used as a qualitative method.



Focus group discussion as a small-scale qualitative study is a crucial research tool to gather people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss and exchange of ideas among selected participants. Within the scope of Kızılaykart programmes, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are being conducted routinely hosted by the households themselves or Turkish Red Crescent Community Centers where available. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and its related health risks, face to face FGDs could not be carried out as usual. Therefore, to enable a quick response to the pandemic situation, the current modality for FGDs is adapted to minimize the impact of COVID-19 in field activities and to ensure the uninterrupted continuity of monitoring activities. TRC has taken an innovative action initiating remote online FGDs through utilizing the technological opportunities. Consequently, rFGDs have proved to be a great monitoring tool as they enable the inclusion of participants with a wide geographical coverage and help reach people who would generally have difficulties in attending face-to-face FGD sessions.



For both face-to-face FGDs and rFGDs, households chosen among sampling lists are asked if they are available and show consent to participate in FGDs through Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) Call Centre 168. After arranging the planned number of participants for each FGD, the field teams go to the households to deliver the devices. All these activities are carried out in full compliance with the safe physical distancing rules and all the hygiene conditions to maintain a safer environment for both staff and participants during the FGD sessions. Simultaneously, all participants participate in a group discussion via an online digital platform guided by moderator staff located in the office. A note-taking staff is also present during the rFGDs. At the end of the session, field teams waiting outside the households collect the devices from the participants.

Programmatic Achievements

1 INNOVATIVE

With the technology, an innovative data collection modality gives opportunity to ensure **data quality** by recording interviews with the consent of the participants. It also increases the quality of analysis and reporting. In addition, rFGDs are **shock responsive** against any instant troubles with the mobility of field teams.



2 MORE INCLUSIVE

rFGDs are designed to capture the general overview of participants without any operational and geographical obstacles so that a wide range of people, including **the most vulnerable**, are simultaneously involved during remote sessions from different regions. Safe physical engagement is still there because the technology is provided to their homes.



3 ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

Even in Covid-19 period, focus group discussions are conducted without any suspension and delay. It enables to ensure communication with the target group and **sustainability** of monitoring activities.



4 SAFER

Field staffs have prioritized **precautionary measures** throughout the entire process, to ensure the safety of their own and the target group. rFGDs enable individual participation for group discussions without any need of any physical gatherings eliminating the concerns related to spread of Covid-19.



5 MORE FOCUSED

Participants are effectively attending to rFGDs in a **more concentrated** way with the personal devices given to them. In contrast to face-to-face discussions, the remote focus group discussions allow for more planned and better-organized sessions. They are ensuring the attendance of a set number of people, whereas in physical FGDs, managing the participants might prove a bit more challenging due to external factors.



6 MORE COMFORTABLE

Participants can express their opinions and elaborate on their experience more easily **without feeling any pressure** since they do not know other participants before. They also do not have to host people in their home or move to another place for FGDs.



7 REAL-TIME FOLLOW-UP

rFGDs strengthens **the collaboration** between field team and the head office with the real time follow up opportunity. The head office is involved in the process from the very beginning and gives/receives quick **feedback** about the implementation. Technical and analytical aspects of rFGDs are also reviewed by M&E Analysis Team. IFRC, as a programme partner, is taking part in the rFGDs as an observer.



8 CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

As the owner of the activity, field staffs from different locations have enough chance to work closely with each other. It strengthens a great sense of team spirit by working together and enhances their capacity by sharing **experiences and lessons learned**.



Challenges

1 CONNECTION PROBLEMS

rFGDs highly depend on the strong network requirements. Due to the coverage problems of the network or inconvenient location (network-wise) of the participants may occasionally affect the quality of connection.



2 BODY LANGUAGE

Reduced interaction due to lack of eye contact and physical presence limits understanding and observing the group dynamics. It sometimes causes a loss of focus and getting clear feedback from participants. It also hinders the ability to facilitate an effective discussion environment and crowd management.



3 REACHING

Since a unique consent form is received for video recording from participants, it is sometimes challenging to get a desirable number of people among the sampled call list. As a result, there is an increasing workload for M&E operators who are making outbound calls for FGD arrangements.



4 RELATIVELY NOT COST EFFICIENT

Multiple field teams are in the field to deliver the devices for each session, so it is not relatively cost-efficient comparing to face to face FGDs, which is conducted by only one team in normal circumstances.



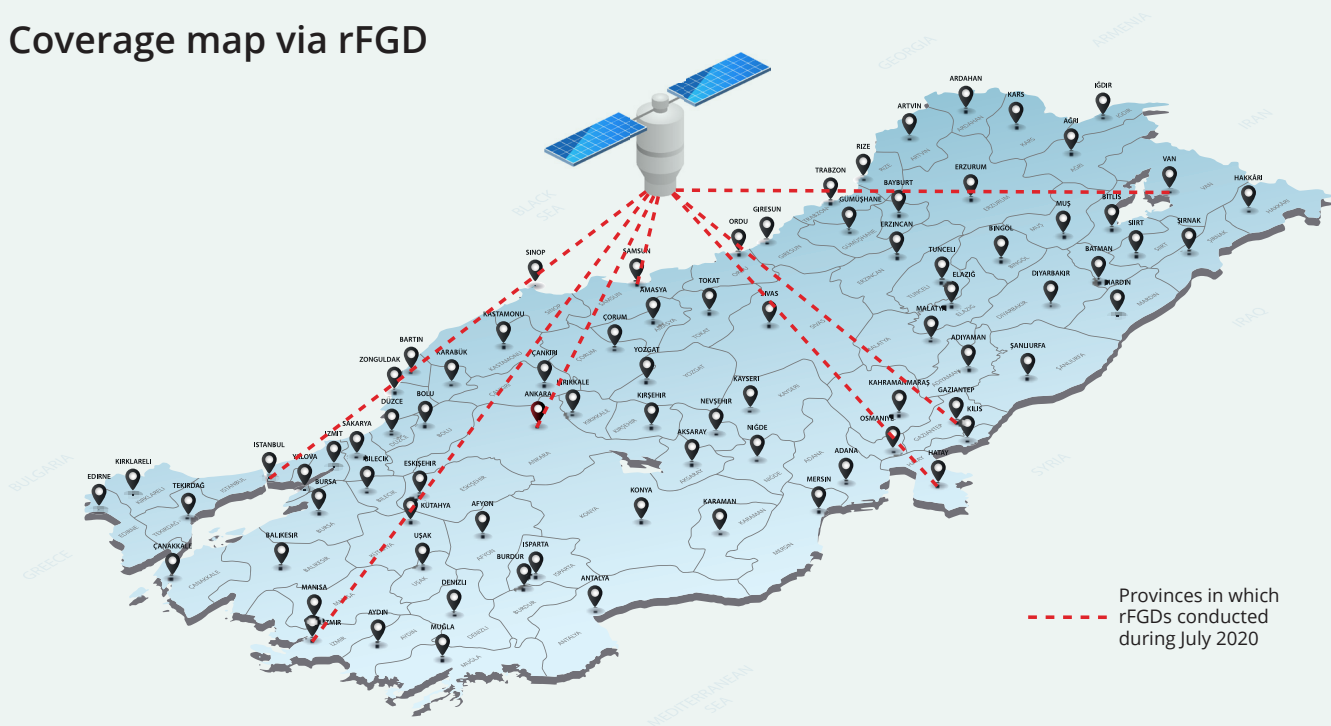
Conclusion

Conducting remote focus group discussions has enabled the continuation of monitoring activities during the COVID19 pandemic. While ensuring social distancing rules and safety measures, running rFGDs with all participants via a video call and the facilitation of a moderator from the office provides qualitative data for ongoing studies.

All field staff can take an active role in moderating FGDs. On the other hand, there is a core list of more qualified staff who are considered as moderators. The staff on the list, which is around 8 to 10, are mainly native speakers or more fluent in Arabic. Apart from this, all field staff has also been assigned as a moderator when applicable in FGDs during July 2020. The aim is to catch up on any other additional potential capacity. Having better skills in managing group dynamics and creating a better discussion environment, this staff among the core list are considered to get training on FGD, which will be held internally by TRC in-house experts to increase the current standards to higher quality.

Conducting smooth and effective rFGDs can only be enabled in situations where infrastructure is adequate. Moreover, limiting the number of people joining the rFGD sessions to 4-6 allows more opportunity for all participants to express their opinions and eases facilitation of discussions remotely for moderators. Field teams are present at the door of each participant to provide support such as arranging simultaneous participation by checking cameras and mics, connecting and familiarizing/instructing the online platform without giving any responsibility to the participant, fix any technological challenges by using back-up devices when necessary. They also take and refer any issue falling under outreach or protection cases and note any other additional points that may come from the participants. This presence of field staff ensures strong coordination between the field and center office. Overall, all these efforts with a strong network between the team members and participants aim to have rewarding results from remote focus group discussion, which at the end resulted in a great lesson learned to continue monitoring activities in periods of crises or shocks.

Coverage map via rFGD





Kızılaykart Cash Based Assistance Programmes Coordinatorship

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