

# Determining the Success of Your Permagarden

## PERMAGARDEN MONITORING AND EVALUATION TOOLS



Program staff often promote permagardens as a means to boost household income, nutrition and other outcomes, but how can they know if these gardens are having the desired effects? This document is intended to guide program staff in monitoring and evaluating the permagarden component of a project. It contains helpful tips and reminders for how to conduct Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and surveys with project participants. It also includes example data collection tools that can be modified to suit the desired learning questions and project environment.

## CONDUCTING A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

### WHY CONDUCT AN FGD

An FGD can be a fast and convenient way to collect qualitative data to better understand how a project is progressing or why certain outcomes have occurred. The information collected from an FGD is best used to understand why something is happening or how people feel about a particular course of events. This can often be a valuable complement to the quantitative information gathered from a survey.

When deciding whether or not to do an FGD as part of your M&E process, first discuss with your team what they want to learn, and then formulate the learning question, or set of questions, that will guide your data collection process. At this point it is possible to decide whether an FGD is appropriate or not. FGDs are best for answering learning questions that seek to better understand the factors or conditions responsible for a behavior,

outcome or social norm. These questions often contain the word “why” or “how come.”

### PROCESS FOR CONDUCTING AN FGD<sup>1</sup>

**WHO:** In addition to carefully selecting the FGD questions, think about who it is important to collect information from. Different participant types can each offer a unique perspective. Examples of participant types include: female, male, or youth participants; extension workers; market chain actors; local officials; and other project stakeholders. You may also consider conducting FGDs with non-participants in order to compare their circumstances and opinions with those of participants. Consider also the best way to group participants so that existing power dynamics or gender norms do not prevent certain voices from being heard. It may be necessary to have women-only FGDs or to hold separate discussions with local officials so that participants can speak freely about their experiences. For convenience, M&E staff often organize FGDs so they are composed of people who live close to each other and have done project activities together; however, participants may be more inspired to share personal information and sensitive opinions if they do not know each other. For this reason, consider organizing FGDs with participants who have not completed the program together. By conducting FGDs with a variety of actors, more insights can be collected that will help answer the learning questions.

Before holding any FGDs, it is important to review the informed consent procedures required by your institution or project partners. It might be necessary to get verbal or written consent from participants before collecting

<sup>1</sup> Krueger, R. (2002). Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews. University of Minnesota. <https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf>

information from them. Even if it is not required to obtain a participant's consent, it is still a good practice to ask for a participant's permission to continue with the discussion after explaining the goal of the discussion, why they were asked to participate, and how the information will be used.

**WHERE:** Make a plan with project participants to meet at a location and time that is convenient for them. Choose a neutral location and be respectful of the amount of time participants are asked to stay. Participants should not be expected to devote more than an hour to the discussion; after this, people tend to become tired or preoccupied with other responsibilities they must attend to.

**WHAT:** During an FGD, ask open-ended questions that invite a range of responses. This will allow you to better understand the diversity of opinions that exist among participants. Avoid collecting numerical information, such as how many hectares people have under cultivation or how many crops they grow, during

an FGD. Instead, put these questions into a survey. By thoughtfully choosing the FGD questions, participants will have a robust discussion that can help explain why certain outcomes were achieved or how they felt about the program.

**HOW:** Plan to conduct as many discussions as is necessary to reach data saturation. **Data saturation** is the point when enough data has been collected that no new information will be gained by conducting additional discussions.

Two staff members are required for each discussion: one to act as a moderator and another to act as an assistant moderator. It is best if the staff conducting the FGD are not well known to the FGD participants so that participants may speak honestly and truthfully about their experience. As much as possible, use staff members who participants are likely to consider neutral or unbiased. The moderator and assistant moderator should speak the local language to avoid miscommunications.



## FGD SNAPSHOT DETAILS

### TOTAL NUMBER OF FGDS TO CONDUCT:

At least 3 per participant type, or until data saturation is reached

### NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER FGD:

8-10 people per group

### LENGTH OF DISCUSSION:

No more than 1 hour

### NUMBER OF FGD QUESTIONS ASKED:

8-12 questions

### NUMBER OF STAFF REQUIRED:

2 staff members

## FGD SNAPSHOT PROCESS

Role of the Moderator	Role of the Assistant Moderator
<b>Before the FDG</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Familiarizes themselves with FGD questions and program to be discussed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handles logistics (snacks, seating, venue)</li> </ul>
<b>During the FDG</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opens session (see page 5)</li> <li>Guides participants through FGD questions, making sure questions are asked in order and each part of the question is answered</li> <li>Controls dominant talkers and people who talk for a very long time or stray off topic</li> <li>Encourages shy participants to talk</li> <li>Uses pauses and probes to get more detailed explanations, examples, and clarifications</li> <li>Pause for at least 5 seconds after participant is done talking</li> <li>Use probes, such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Would you explain further?”</i></li> <li><i>“Would you give an example?”</i></li> <li><i>“I don’t understand.”</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>Uses verbal and nonverbal actions to create a safe and open environment for discussion                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Discusses ground rules on how to manage disagreements and take turns sharing opinions</li> <li>» Uses head nodding to encourage participants to talk</li> <li>» Uses neutral language like “ok” or “thank you” instead of responding with “that’s good”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Takes careful notes, including writing down as many direct quotes as possible and gender/participant type of speaker                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Ex: Male Farmer: “.....” or Female Local Official: “.....”</li> </ul> </li> <li>Does not participate in the discussion</li> <li>Alerts moderator if he or she sees someone who looks like they have something to say, but has not been called on</li> <li>Does not glance at their phone when participants are talking</li> </ul>
<b>Closing the FDG</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After participants approve of oral summary provided by assistant moderator, explains next steps, such as who will look at FGD notes or listen to audio recordings and what they will do with that information</li> <li>Closes session (see page 5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides oral summary to participants at the end of discussion (see page 5)</li> </ul>
<b>After the FDG</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviews material with assistant moderator directly after discussion to capture information that was not written down</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviews material with moderator directly after discussion to capture information that was not written down</li> </ul>

## HOW TO RECORD FGD DATA: USING NOTES AND AUDIO RECORDINGS

### Note taking and operating the audio recorder is the primary responsibility of the assistant moderator

The assistant moderator should set up the audio recorder before participants begin speaking and should take notes throughout the discussion. The moderator should focus on guiding the discussion rather than taking notes.

### Notes should be clear and consistent

Anticipate that others will use your FGD notes. FGD notes sometimes are interpreted days or weeks following the focus group when memory has faded. Consistency and clarity are essential.

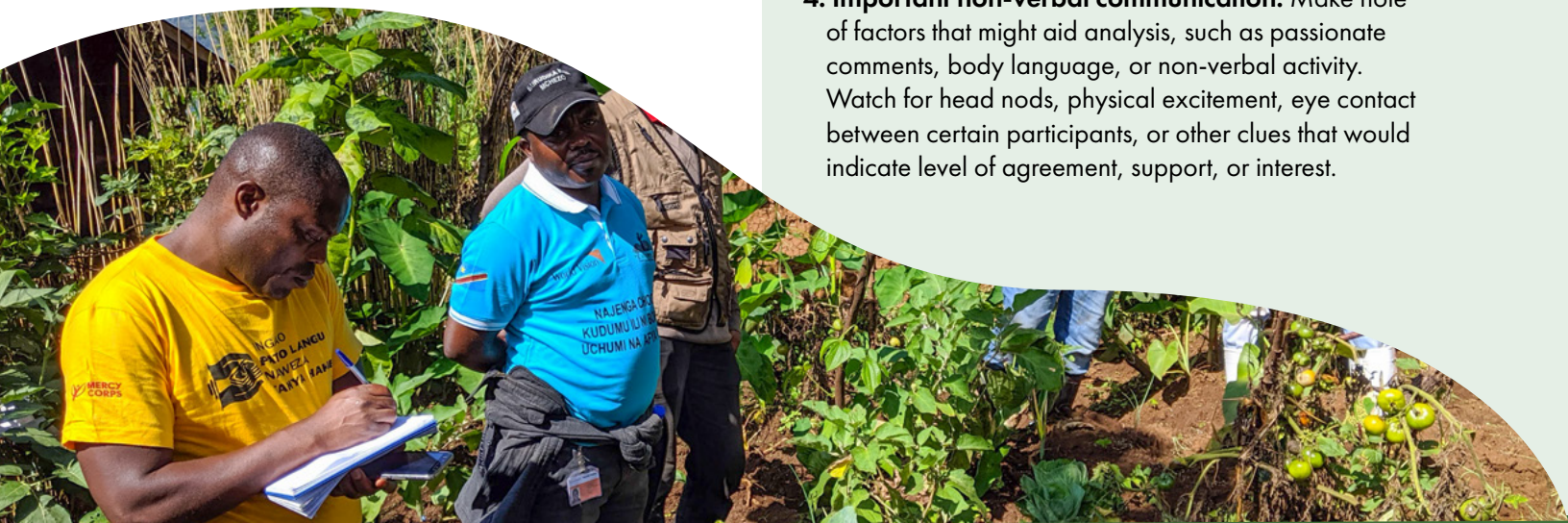
### Note taking should be prioritized over audio recordings

Even when recording the discussion, the assistant moderator should continue to take detailed written notes during the discussion. Audio recordings should be considered a back up to the written notes, rather than the primary form of data collection. This is because audio recordings can be arduous and time consuming to extract information from. They can also be unreliable. It can be difficult to hear participants who are seated far away from the recorder and background noises can drown out certain parts of the conversation. Sometimes, the discussion does not record, an audio file is erased, or the file cannot be played later. Because of this, it is best to use the recordings as a way to check written notes for accuracy later.

### Notes will contain a few different types of information

It is essential that all types of information are easily identified and organized. Your field notes will contain:

- 1. Contextual information for each discussion:** Before beginning, write down the location, date, time, number and gender breakdown of participants.
- 2. Quotes:** Listen for notable quotes, the well said statements that illustrate an important point of view. Listen for sentences or phrases that are particularly enlightening or eloquently express a particular point of view. Place identifying information after the quotations, like "F-GO" or "M-Farm" for Female Government Official or Male Farmer. Usually, it is impossible to capture the entire quote. Capture as much as you can with attention to the key phrases. Use three periods (...) to indicate that part of the quote was missing.
- 3. Key points and counterpoints for each question:** Typically, participants will emphasize one, or a few, key points in response to each question. These points may be reiterated by multiple participants who are in agreement with each other. If something is repeated by many different people, it can be starred or marked with arrows. Sometimes, a participant will share an interesting counterpoint to the popular opinion. Even though this opinion is only said one time, it also deserves attention. Note this counterpoint through a different method, such as an underline. Be sure to indicate somewhere in the notes what method was used to capture key points and counterpoints. At the end of the discussion, the assistant moderator will share these points with participants for confirmation.
- 4. Important non-verbal communication:** Make note of factors that might aid analysis, such as passionate comments, body language, or non-verbal activity. Watch for head nods, physical excitement, eye contact between certain participants, or other clues that would indicate level of agreement, support, or interest.



## HOW TO OPEN THE DISCUSSION

Use a script, like the one in the box below, to open the discussion. The first few moments of an FGD are used to create a thoughtful, open atmosphere, provide ground rules, and inform participants of the purpose of the discussion. This introduction should be fast, so as not to take time away from the discussion.

### 1. Create the right environment

FGDs are only successful if participants feel like their opinions and experiences are important, respected and useful.

- Sit in a circle or arrangement where everyone can see everyone else
- Moderator and note taker are at same level as participants
- Make sure everyone is comfortable (in shade, with water, seated comfortably)
- Before beginning the discussion, tell everyone how long the discussion will take

### 2. Provide ground rules

- There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view
- Even negative comments can be useful
- It is ok to disagree with someone, but do it respectfully
- Please silence your phones. If you have to take a phone call, do it away from the group and rejoin us as quickly as possible

### 3. Inform participants of the purpose of the discussion, why they were chosen, and how the information will be used

Be very clear that there will be no negative consequences for sharing their opinions and that all opinions are welcome

Explain who will look at the information collected and what they will do with it

Emphasize that no identifying or sensitive information, such as their names or locations, will be shared with anyone beyond the data collection team

### 4. Go straight into the first question!

## HOW TO CLOSE THE DISCUSSION

### 1. Assistant moderator reviews information with participants and asks if anything has been missed

- Take a few minutes to summarize only the main points mentioned by participants. Only read what seemed to be key points of consensus and note if there was some disagreement between participants
- Ask participants *"Is this a good summary? Have we missed anything?"* and note down anything they want to add or emphasize

### 2. Moderator reviews the next steps with participants

- Reiterate who will look at notes and how they will use them

### 3. Thanks and dismissal



## EXAMPLE INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT

*Good morning and welcome to our session, which will last no longer than one hour. Thanks for taking the time to join us to talk about your experiences as a [FGD participant type] in the [name of project]. My name is ... and assisting me is .... We both work with [organization name]. We were asked to help [organization name] staff learn from you about your experiences in [project name] and how it may have [FGD research goals]. They want to know [more details about discussion goals] because [how the data will be used]. We are having discussions like this with several groups in the area. You were invited because [reason participants were selected]. There are no wrong answers, only differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.*

*We ask that you silence your telephone so that we may have a good conversation with minimal distractions and everyone participating. If you have to take a call, we ask that you take it away from the group and join us again as soon as you are able.*

*You've probably noticed we will be taking notes during the discussion. We're taking notes because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions. We will not be recording your names in these notes, so you can be assured that your comments are completely confidential. Nothing you say during this discussion will result in a punishment to you in any way. The reports will go back to our main office to help [organization name] understand what your experiences were.*

*Let's begin. Let's find out some more about each other by quickly going around the table. Tell us your name and where you live.*

## CONDUCTING A SURVEY

### WHY CONDUCT A SURVEY

Surveys are used to collect quantitative information, such as how many people have used certain practices or how much additional income was earned from having a permagarden. They can also be used to determine changes over time, such as how household diets have changed as a result of having a permagarden.

When deciding whether or not to do a survey as part of your M&E process, first discuss with your team what they want to learn, and then formulate the learning question, or set of questions, that will guide your data collection process. At this point it is possible to decide whether a survey is appropriate or not. Surveys are best used to better understand what outcomes have occurred as a result of the project.

### PROCESS FOR CONDUCTING A SURVEY

#### Who

Who is surveyed will depend on the learning questions asked. Randomly select which participants to survey by using a random number generator. Many random number generators can be found for free online, such as the one found at [www.randomizer.org](http://www.randomizer.org). Assign every participant in the project a number through the randomizer and then survey Participant #1 through your final sample number. Randomly selecting the participants in your survey ensures that the data collected represents the entire scope of your project participants, rather than being more heavily weighted towards one type of participant over another. Also consider collecting information from participants and non-participants to see if there is a difference between them. Non-participants should share characteristics with the participants. For example, they may come from the same village and have similar wealth status, living conditions, employment opportunities, and land access and availability.

Before conducting any surveys, it is important to review the informed consent procedures required by your institution or project partners. It might be necessary to get verbal or written consent from participants before collecting information from them. Even if it is not required to obtain a participant's consent, it is still a good practice to ask for a participant's permission to continue with the survey questions after explaining the purpose of the survey and how the information will be used.



## Where

Surveys are often conducted at a participant's home or field at a time that is convenient for them. Enumerators should make sure the participant is comfortable before beginning the survey. Participants should not be expected to devote more than 30 minutes to answering questions; after this, people tend to become tired or preoccupied with other responsibilities they must attend to.

## When

Time your survey to collect as much information as possible from the current harvest season. This means conducting the survey towards the end of the harvest season or at the beginning of the next season. It is often difficult for participants to accurately remember many details from previous seasons, so consider conducting the survey every season that data is required.

## What

Avoid asking open-ended questions in a survey, such as "What do you like most about having a permagarden?". Instead, focus on close-ended questions with pre-populated answer choices. Likert scale questions can be used to determine how satisfied participants are with the program, the extent to which they agree or disagree with a particular statement, or how often they do something.

Focus food consumption questions on women and young children rather than asking about household food consumption. Since food may be shared unequally within the household, and women and young children tend to be the household members most prone to undernutrition, it is important to hone in on dietary changes for these two specific groups.

## How

Train enumerators thoroughly before beginning to survey participants. They should practice how to explain each question in multiple ways in case it is misunderstood by participants, how to redirect a participant if they steer off track, how to ask questions that are not leading, and how to help a participant calculate certain answers, such as total crop yields or income generated. They should also understand how to help a participant feel comfortable during the survey process, for example by informing the participant how long the survey will take upfront, asking the participant where they would prefer to conduct the survey, and being understanding if the participant does not want to take the survey or wishes to stop in the middle.

Pilot the survey with a small group of participants prior to using it. Piloting can help an M&E team refine the survey by illuminating questions that need to be rephrased and answer choices that are incomplete. It can also help determine if the survey is too long or confusing for participants. In addition, piloting the survey allows enumerators to continue to hone their skills prior to collecting data that will be used for analysis.





## EXAMPLE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions can be used to determine what factors contribute to a household's decision to:

- Establish a permagarden that meets the minimum standards, and
- Maintain that garden

These questions can be asked to project participants directly, project trainers or extension agents who have worked with participants, project partners, or local officials who have been involved with the project.

1. In your opinion, what makes a household either interested or NOT interested in establishing a permagarden?
2. What are the biggest challenges you have observed with establishing and maintaining a permagarden?
3. What could be done to better support households who are thinking about establishing a permagarden?
4. Why do some households choose to maintain their permagarden and others do not?
5. What could be done to better support households who have established a permagarden and now need to maintain it?
6. What benefits have you observed for households that choose to establish and maintain a permagarden?
7. Going forward, would you like to see more or fewer permagardens established? Why or why not? Would you change anything about the permagarden technology going forward?



## EXAMPLE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

### PERMAGARDEN MONITORING SURVEY TOOL

This sample survey can be used to do a rapid, post-program assessment of the nutrition and income outcomes resulting from a project's permagarden activities. The survey collects data related to garden production practices, workload, yields, income and savings generated, and dietary changes within the household. It also contains questions to ascertain a participant's level of engagement in a permagarden training and the condition of their garden and its various components. The survey is intended to be conducted only after a program has been implemented; it asks participants to reflect upon the changes they made rather than comparing data collected pre- and post-program. The questions provided are a template only and should be modified to suit the specific survey needs of your M&E team.

Question #	Survey Question	Responses
<b>SURVEY INFO</b>		
1	Date of interview	
2	Enumerator name	
3	Name of community where interview took place	
4	Name of [project name] group	
<b>HOUSEHOLD PROFILE</b>		
5	Respondent's name	
6	Respondent's age	
7	Respondent's gender	
8	What is your position within the household?  <i>"Household" refers to individuals living and eating together. The head of the household is one of the members of the household recognized as the head of the unit by the other members of the household unit or by themselves if living alone.</i>	Head of household Wife Husband Sister Brother Daughter Son Other relative Other_____
9	How many children are in the household and what ages are they?	Number of children____ Ages of children _____
10	Is the respondent currently pregnant and/or breastfeeding?	Yes/No

## EXAMPLE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Question#	Survey Question	Responses
<b>PG TRAINING ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION</b>		
11	How many permagarden trainings have you completed?	__ # of trainings
12	Have you received any extension services support for your permagarden?	Yes/No
13	If yes, how many visits have you received from [project name] staff, an Agriculture Village Agent, a Trainer of Trainers (ToT), or someone from a local government office to assist you with your permagarden?	_____ # of visits
14	<p>What new techniques have you implemented as a result of the training you received under the [project name] project?</p> <p>Check all that apply.</p> <p><i>This question should be completed in the garden so that the enumerator can confirm which techniques have been used. Interviewees might not know the name of the specific techniques they have used. If so, a trained enumerator can help by listing and describing the techniques used by the project.</i></p>	<p><i>The list of techniques should be amended to match those taught by the project.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Double digging/ Double dug bed</li> <li>Wood ash/charcoal application</li> <li>Composting</li> <li>Mulching</li> <li>Swales</li> <li>Berms</li> <li>Half-moons</li> <li>Mulch pit</li> <li>Banana circle</li> <li>Rainwater catchment holes</li> <li>Capturing waste water for irrigation</li> <li>Plastic water bottle irrigation</li> <li>Sack mound gardening</li> <li>Clay pot irrigation</li> <li>Triangular plant spacing</li> <li>Crop rotation or intercropping</li> <li>Succession planting</li> <li>Manure application</li> <li>Liquid fertilizer (tea) application</li> <li>Liquid herbicide (tea) application</li> <li>Live fence planting</li> <li>Other (specify)</li> </ul>

## EXAMPLE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Question #	Survey Question	Responses
<b>WORKLOAD</b>		
15	Who is the primary caretaker of the permagarden?	Me Wife Husband Sister Brother Daughter Son Other relative _____ Joint responsibility of all household members Other _____
16	On average, how much time per week do you spend maintaining the permagarden?	Less than 1 hour 1-2 hours 2-4 hours 4-8 hours More than 1 day
17	How close is the permagarden to your home?	Next to the house/inside the compound Less than 15-minute walk 15–30-minute walk More than 30-minute walk
<b>PRODUCTION AND HARVEST DATA</b>		
18	How many different types of annual food crops have you grown in your permagarden and what are they?	_____ number of annual food crops grown  <i>Examples include maize, beans, peas, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, cassava, bananas, sorghum, and soybeans. List should be amended to fit the project area.</i>
19	How many of these annual food crops have you been able to harvest and what are they?	_____ number of annual food crops harvested  <i>Examples include maize, beans, peas, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, cassava, bananas, sorghum, and soybeans. List should be amended to fit the project area.</i>
20	How many non-food crops (medicinal plants, fodder, building material, etc.) have you grown in your permagarden and what are they?	_____ number of non-food crops grown  <i>Examples include lemongrass, mint, elephant grass, Napier grass, and moringa. List should be amended to fit the project area.</i>
21	How many of these have you been able to harvest?	_____ number of non-food crops harvested
22	How many different types of fruit trees/vines have you grown in your permagarden?	_____ number of fruit trees/vine types grown  <i>Examples include passion fruit, tree tomato, watermelon, jackfruit, and guava. List should be amended to fit the project area.</i>

## EXAMPLE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Question #	Survey Question	Responses
<b>PRODUCTION AND HARVEST DATA (CONTINUED)</b>		
23	How many of these different types of fruit trees/vines have you been able to harvest?	_____ number of fruit trees/vine types harvested
24	For how many weeks were you able to harvest from your permagarden during the current season?  <i>Enumerator may need to assist the interviewee to estimate how many weeks they were able to harvest. e.g., if respondent says early June to late Sept, the enumerator can help calculate how many weeks.</i>	_____ weeks
<b>INCOME GENERATED</b>		
25	Do you ever sell the crops or plants you harvest from your permagarden?	Yes/No
26	If yes, how much do you estimate you have earned over the course of the current season?  <i>Enumerator may need to assist the interviewee to estimate how much they earn in a week of high sales, followed by the number of weeks of high sales, and how much they earn in a week of low sales, followed by the number of weeks of low sales.</i>	_____ total income earned during current season in local currency
27	How much of the income you have generated through selling products from your permagarden have you directed towards a savings group, such as a SILC or VSLA?	_____ total income directed towards a savings group
28	In your opinion, to what extent has the income earned from your permagarden helped you (with 10 =helped a lot 1=helped very little)?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

## EXAMPLE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Question #	Survey Question	Responses
<b>FOOD CONSUMPTION</b>		
29	Do you or your household consume any of the crops you harvest from your permagarden?	Yes/No
30	<p>If so, what crops did <i>[household member, typically a female or child]</i> regularly consume from the permagarden during the current season?</p> <p><i>Listen to respondent's answer and then tick the appropriate boxes on the survey form. This question can be asked for multiple household members</i></p>	<p><i>Answers include all crop options present in Questions 18, 20 and 22.</i></p>
31	Are there any new crops from the permagarden that you have eaten that you were not eating before?	Yes/No
32	<p>If so, what crops does <i>[household member, typically a female or child]</i> eat now that they did not eat before?</p> <p><i>Listen to respondent's answer and then tick the appropriate boxes on the survey form. This question can be asked for multiple household members.</i></p>	
33	If you sell crops or plants from your permagarden, do you ever use this money to purchase other food items for your household?	Yes/No
34	<p>If so, what food items do you frequently purchase for your household using this income?</p> <p><i>Listen to respondent's answer and then tick the appropriate boxes on the survey form.</i></p>	<p><i>Answers include all crop options present in Questions 18, 20 and 22, as well as additional items that are frequently purchased such as oils, salt, sugar, spices, flours, and so on.</i></p>
35	In your opinion, to what extent has the permagarden helped your household maintain your food supply during the hungry season (with 10 =helped a lot 1=helped very little)?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
36	Now that you have experienced the process of establishing and maintaining a permagarden, would you do it again?	Yes/No



**About SCALE:** SCALE is an initiative funded by USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) to enhance the impact, sustainability, and scalability of BHA-funded agriculture, natural resource management, and alternative livelihoods activities in emergency and non-emergency contexts. SCALE is implemented by Mercy Corps in collaboration with Save the Children.

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