

Assessing Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Communities in  
Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands after Hurricanes Irma and Maria

**FOCUS GROUP**

**Moderator's Guide**

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**I. OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTIONS**

WELCOME

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is [moderator]. I will be the moderator for our discussion today. We really appreciate you taking the time and making the effort to be here. Each of you experienced the 2017 hurricanes here in [Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands] and we are interested in understanding your experiences with the hurricanes and their effects on you, your land/farm/forest and your livelihoods.

Over the next 90 minutes or so we will discuss four major topics: (1) the effects or impacts of the hurricanes, (2) preparations or preventive actions you may have made prior to the hurricanes' landfall, (3) how you coped and what you did immediately after the hurricanes, and (4) what the recovery process has been like over the past year and your plans for the future. We'll spend about 20-25 minutes on each topic.

MODERATOR AND ASSISTANT INTRODUCTIONS

I am a [position] with [employer]. I am here to facilitate the discussion and listen to your answers. I have a series of discussion topics and questions to cover, and I want to hear as much as possible from each of you. At times I may need to ask you to wrap-up your response so that we can move on to other respondents or topics.

Also, at the back of the room are [ASSISTANTS/OBSERVERS]. S/he/they will be observing today's discussion. If you need anything, please let one of us know.

## DISCLOSURES

Everything you tell us today will be kept confidential. You will notice that there are two audio recorders on the table, which we will be using to help ensure the accuracy of captured information. These recordings are strictly for research purposes and will not be used beyond the research team. We will transcribe the recordings and combine your responses. Individual statements will never be attributed to specific individuals in any reports, publications, or other information generated from this research, but we may say, for example, that farmers in [PR/USVI] said x.

## FACILITIES AND SAFETY INFORMATION

The bathrooms are [provide directions] and there is food on the back table. At any time, please feel free to use the facilities and to grab some food or beverage.

For your safety, please note that the exits are located [give locations]. In case of a, [identify potential emergencies and related instructions].

## GROUND RULES

During our time together, we invite you to speak up and share your experiences, ideas, and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers – the goal is to hear a range of experiences and viewpoints, not to reach any type of consensus.

To help facilitate today's discussion, here are a few guidelines: (include the following as a print out at each participant's seat)

- Speak one at a time
- Speak in a loud, clear voice
- Say your first name (only), before you speak
- Avoid side conversations
- Everyone gets a chance to speak
- It is ok to agree or disagree, but always observe common courtesies
- Remember, there are no wrong answers
- And finally, if you have a cell phone, please turn it off or set it to vibrate

## **II. GROUP INTRODUCTIONS**

First, I'd like to go around the table/room and ask each of you to:

1. Introduce yourself by saying your name, your occupation, the area where you live, and something you like about where you live.

## **III. HURRICANE EFFECTS**

2. Now, I'd like for each of you to tell us about the effects of the recent hurricanes on your land, farm, business, and livelihood. Please take a few minutes to briefly describe the most significant impacts that you experienced (probes/prompts/listen for):
  - a. Effects on farmland, forest, crops, livestock, infrastructure
  - b. Economic costs associated with these effects

## **IV. HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS**

Now, I'd like for us to talk about any preventative actions or preparations you may have taken prior to the hurricane(s) and how prepared or unprepared you felt you were for it/them.

3. Did anyone here take any preventative actions immediately (i.e., 3 days or so) prior to Hurricane Irma and/or Maria to reduce the expected effects on your land, farm, business, and/or livelihood?
  - a. Can you briefly tell us what you did to prepare for the hurricane(s) and how effective these preparations were?
  - b. Was there any specific organization/information/program that influenced your decisions to take these actions? If yes, what was it?/Where did you get it from?
  - c. Is there any other information that you wished you would have had to better prepare for the hurricane(s)?
  
4. If there was one preventative action or preparation you wish you would have taken before the hurricane(s), what it would have been?
  
5. Has anyone here taken any longer term measures (i.e., in the months to years prior to Hurricane Irma/Maria) to decrease the vulnerability of your land, farm, business, and/or livelihood to tropical storms or hurricanes?
  - a. Can you briefly tell us what you did and how effective it was on a scale of 1 (not at all effective) to 5 (extremely effective)?
  - b. Was there any specific organization/program/information that influenced your decisions to take these measures? If yes, what was it?/Where did you get it from?
  - c. Is there any other information that you wished you would have had to help you prepare in the longer term for this/these hurricane(s)?

## **V. COPING, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY**

Now, I'd like for us to talk about what you did to cope with or respond to the hurricanes during and immediately after they passed over the island.

6. By a show of hands, how many of you were on/within a few miles of your farm/facility when the hurricane(s) made landfall. For those who didn't raise your hands, how long was it before you could get to your farm/facility after the storm(s) had passed?
7. In the first few days and weeks after the hurricane(s), what did you do to respond to or cope with the hurricane's effects on your land, farm, business, livelihood (can listen/prompt here for foraging/collection of forest foods or medicinals)?
8. What was the most challenging thing for you to cope with or respond to in the first few days to weeks after the hurricane(s) passed?
9. What assistance/support, if any, did you have you in the first few days to weeks after the hurricanes to cope with or respond to the impacts of the hurricane(s)?
  - a. What specifically did the assistance address? When did it occur? From whom did it come? (listen/prompt for specific USDA programs)
  - b. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the immediate assistance you received to address the effects on your land, farm, business, and/or livelihood?
  - c. What, if any, was the most effective assistance/support you received immediately following the hurricanes? Can you tell us briefly about that?
10. In the year or so since the 2017 hurricanes, what has been the most challenging thing for you to respond to or recover from in terms of your land, farm, business, or livelihood?
11. What assistance/support for your land, farm, business, and/or livelihood have you received in the year since the hurricanes?
  - a. What specifically has the assistance addressed? When did it occur? From whom did it come?

- b. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this assistance?
- c. What, if any, has been the most effective assistance/support you have received since the hurricanes? Can you tell us briefly about that?
- d. Please take a few minutes to fill out the sheet of paper in front you. (Provide table listing USDA programs with columns to indicate level of interaction with programs and assessment of their effectiveness in your preparedness, response or recovery associated with the 2017 hurricanes.)

## **VI. MID-LONG TERM PLANS FOR AGRICULTURE, FORESTS, COMMUNITIES**

Finally, let's talk about your plans for the future...

- 12. What are your plans for your land, farm, and/or business over the next 3-5 years.
  - a. If you own land, how likely are you to sell or give it/any of it away in the next year? In the next 3-5 years?
  - b. Did your plans for the future change because of the hurricanes? If yes, how so?

## **VII. IF THERE IS EXTRA TIME**

13. Let's pretend for a moment that this pen in front of you is now a magic wand and you can use it to write down the one or two things that you think would make this island's farms, forests, and rural communities most resilient to future storms, what would it be?

## **VIII. CLOSING**

This brings us to the end of our questions and topics of discussion. Thank you all very much for coming today and for this rich discussion. Does anyone have anything else to share? Or, to ask

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us? If you think of something later that you would like to add or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. Many thanks again.

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