

**REPORT OF CDC-SUPPORTED MESSAGE TESTING OF
ZANDI'S SONG in KANO STATE, NIGERIA**

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Drafted by the Zandi's Song Project Team

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BACKGROUND

The Academy for Educational Development (AED) has developed a new set of educational materials that can be used in a variety of African settings to raise awareness among African children regarding avian flu (AI), and involve them in educating their communities about the disease. The primary product is a 28-page colorfully illustrated story book, called Zandi's Song, which is packaged together with a teacher's guide, 2 child-friendly prevention posters, a fact sheet and "quick facts about AI prevention" bookmarks¹. Zandi's Song narrates the story of a 15-year-old girl who raises chickens to help pay her school fees. The book discusses the transmission and prevention of avian influenza, as the main character becomes empowered to help her village learn more about protecting itself against the virus.

There is an urgent need in Africa for accurate information on avian influenza, and particularly in Nigeria where poultry stocks have been hard hit. While developed and tested in Kenya, AED encourages the adaptation of these materials across all African nations. Before a direct translation is undertaken, a Nigerian communication research team, under the direction of CDC consultant, Dr. Jodie Abbatangelo-Gray, field tested Zandi's Song in two local government areas (LGAs) within Kano in northern Nigeria: Gwale (semi-urban) and Ungogo (rural). Activities took place September 18-22, 2006.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Results from the Kano study presented here will help illuminate how to best adapt the Zandi's Song reader to the Nigerian context, as well as gain additional perspectives on local knowledge, beliefs and behaviors regarding avian flu. It should be noted that findings from this study are preliminary. Results should be considered in tandem with findings from additional focus groups conducted in Abuja and Lagos States, Nigeria, which have yet to be undertaken and are contingent upon funding.

The Zandi's Song project also set out to achieve three important secondary goals. Based on the data culled from previous communication surveillance efforts in Nigeria, CDC researchers found that qualitative research skills could be greatly strengthened. The training and practice associated with the Zandi's Song project provided an additional opportunity to train-up a sentinel team of Nigerian

¹ All materials are available for viewing online at: <http://avianflu.aed.org/zandi.htm>.

researchers on in-depth qualitative research methodology. By enhancing capacity on the ground, this core team will now be able to disseminate research skills to the larger population of local public enlightenment communication professionals.

An additional benefit of these activities was to create an opportunity for the various Ministries to come together on joint communication efforts. This is particularly important for reintroducing into the fold the Health Promotion Division within the Ministry of Health, Department of Public Health, which is now under new leadership. This activity-based introduction appears to have succeeded in fostering an environment of ongoing collaboration, which has since extended beyond the activities specific to the Zandi's Song project.

The final goal of the Zandi's Song Project was to promote awareness of avian flu, as well as bolster relationships between research team members and local health, agriculture, media and government officials. Members of the team conducted AI advocacy visits to the Management of Kano State Television Corporation, Local Government Councillors and Chief Executives of Hospitals. At Kano State Television Corporation, the General Manager expressed his desire to partner with Federal Ministries of Information, Agriculture and Health (FMINO) to promote AI awareness, and stated that the station would translate jingles brought by the Ministries into Hausa and air them at no cost. Additionally, aggressive AI sensitisation was conducted in both LGAs where research was conducted, and IEC materials were freely distributed.

D. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative focus group methodology was used for conducting research in both Gwale and Ungogo LGAs. One moderator, two verbal note-takers and one non-verbal note taker were employed. In addition, a tape recorder was used as a backup for any information that may have been missed by note takers. During each focus group, participants and researchers sat together in a circle while the moderator/storyteller read the story and stopped periodically to ask questions.

An in-depth description of researcher training activities, and the procedures and protocol followed during focus group research activities, is provided in the Research Protocol Guide (see Appendix I). A primer on qualitative research methodology (and focus group interviewing in particular) was provided to the

research team before commencing research in order to help inform researcher activities (see Appendix II for Qualitative Research Primer). A Discussion Guide was developed and used to direct the moderator's focus of discussion (see Appendix III for Discussion Guide).

Study Sample

Ten to eleven public school children between the ages of ten and fifteen were selected for participation in each LGA. The first focus group consisted of 11 participants, and was conducted in the semi-urban LGA of Gwale. Because public schools in the Northern part of the country are segregated by gender, 5 boys (ages 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14) were selected from Government Secondary School Sani Mainagge, and 6 girls (ages 10 (2), 11, 12, 13, 14) were selected from Government Secondary School Gwale. The second focus group included 10 participants, and was conducted in the rural LGA of Ungogo. Again, boys and girls were recruited from different schools: 5 girls (ages 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14) were selected from Government Girls' Junior Secondary School Kadawa, and 5 boys (ages 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14) were selected from both Ungogo Senior Boys' Secondary School and Boys' Senior Secondary School Tanisku.

Students were recruited with the assistance of local Ministry of Health LGA representatives, coordinated by representative, Foazat Awelenge, from the Health Promotion Division within the Ministry of Health, Department of Public Health in Abuja. Recruitment criteria included the following:

- The focus group should comprise a balance of girls and boys;
- The focus group should comprise a range of ages, 10 through 14 (preferably one boy and one girls from each age group);
- Participants should be fluent in English (note: the first language of Kano is Hausa);
- Participants should be willing to freely share their opinions in a group setting;
- Participants should have first hand experience with raising chickens;
- Participants must be part of the local public school system.

Study Setting

Focus groups were arranged with two LGAs in Kano State Nigeria. The communities within both LGAs chosen are predominantly Muslim.

In each focus group, children, moderator and note takers were seated informally in a circle within a classroom setting. The respective girls' schools were used for

focus group activities; male participants were transported in from neighbouring boys schools. To limit bias, school instructors and other onlookers were encouraged to leave the premises. Two adults from the local MOH remained in the classroom for observation, and to offer translation services (from Hausa to English) when necessary².

FINDINGS

It is important to note that there were a fair number of differences between focus groups. Whether or not these apparent differences in opinion and experience are valid, or are as a result of the language barrier most acutely experienced within the rural focus group setting, is not entirely clear. It should also be noted that prayer sessions were being held intermittently throughout the focus group held in Ungogo (rural LGA), as were noisy cleansing activities, which not only made it more difficult to hear one another during the discussions, but appeared to distract participants at intervals throughout the proceedings. Conducting additional research (at least 1 more focus group) within other predominantly Muslim communities in Nigeria is highly recommended in order to achieve reliable consensus findings.

In Gwale (semi-urban LGA) the girls were more interactive during group discussions, whereas it was the boys who participated more enthusiastically in Ungogo (rural) LGA. When asked if they were interested in listening to a story about how one girl from Nigeria deals with the threat of bird flu, participants from both groups chorused an affirmation and appeared excited.

Since the focus group discussions logically followed the flow of the Zandi's Song (ZS) reader, the findings below are presented in order of how themes emerged in the storytelling. Copies of the original transcripts are available upon request.

All 11 participants in the semi-urban LGA of Gwale reported that their families currently raised chicken, while only 7 or the 10 from the Ungogo reported doing so. (These latter figures are likely due to the inability to restock post-bird flu

² As it turned out, participants from the semi-urban LGA (Gwale) had reasonably good comprehension and command of the English language, and minimal interpretation was needed. However, students from the rural LGA (Ungogo) were not nearly as proficient with the English language (despite attempts to recruit bilingual students), and thus translation was required throughout most of the discussion.

devastation earlier in the spring of this year.) Among those who reported raising chicken, all children (except one boy) said they were responsible for feeding their chicken, and everyone reported being responsible for egg collection and cage cleaning. Three (3) of the girls from the Ungogo group also reported regularly “playing” with their chickens.

When probing on the cultural appropriateness of the name “Zandi”, both groups unanimously agreed that the name is not common in their own communities, and most reported never having heard of it before. After asking participants to come up with another name that might be more culturally appropriate, the semi-urban Gwale group voted on using the name “Aisha” throughout the storytelling, and the rural community “Zainab”. Close runners-up included Binta, Amina and Maryam. Since the Ungogo focus group followed the Gwale research, participants of that group were also asked to assess the name “Aisha”. All appeared to like that name as well.

Many participants had personally experienced high poultry die-offs during the recent period of endemic avian influenza in Nigeria (Jan-March 2006), particularly those from the rural Ungogo LGA. Still, even with extensive probing and explanation, participants from the rural group in Ungogo were not familiar with the term “bird flu,” or any derivative thereof. Furthermore, they seemed not to connect the discussion about bird flu we were having with what had occurred in their own village. On the contrary, about half the participants from Gwale said they had heard about bird flu (but not “avian influenza”).

In exploring local dietary customs, participants from Gwale indicated that a meal of rice and eggs, as depicted in the ZS reader, are rarely eaten together. Fried or boiled eggs with yam (and sometimes potato) is reportedly more common. On the other hand, the Ungogo group felt that the food combination described in ZS was not unusual in their own community, and a couple of participants talked about the boiling of rice and eggs, especially during Ramadan.

Participants were also asked about the textile that Zandi’s elders are depicted as weaving in the storybook. Children from Gwale did not know what “quilts” are, though when it was explained they conceded that blankets were purchased pre-made from the local markets. The group felt that the picture accompanying this part of the story was more illustrative of floor mats, which are commonly woven by hand within their community using colored strips or patches of leather, reeds, or plastic fibers. Gaining clarity on this issue among the Ungogo group was more

challenging given the pervasive language barrier. A couple of participants in the group did concede that clothes are made by hand in their community, though given the local costume of uniform color and style, it is unlikely they were connecting the storybook illustration to these articles referenced.

Students from the Gwale focus groups referred to their pet animals as “domestics”, though the concept was not initially easily understood and much probing was required before arriving at this determination. While participants in the Gwale group did appear to eventually arrive at a clear understanding of what a pet was, and some even had novel names for their pets, about half of the Ungogo group appeared not to comprehend the concept of keeping pets (they did, however, passively agree that “domestic” is what you might label such a creature). Most participants in both groups did, however, acknowledge having a neighbour who kept a dog (or did so themselves), perhaps more for reasons of protection than companionship. While it remains unclear whether dogs are kept more as protectors than pets, when asked “what is your favourite animal” during the icebreaker exercise at the beginning of the focus groups, none volunteered dogs.

The worry about the dangers and ramifications of bird flu was strongly salient among the semi-urban Gwale group. Participants were asked if they would be as concerned as Zandi appeared to be in the story. Nearly all the female participants in this group shot back “yes!” without hesitation, and the boys trailed with head nods and verbal responses in the affirmative. When probed, a couple of girls and one boy explained they were saddened by the death of their own chickens earlier in the year. One of the boys also expressed identification with the fact that Zandi might not be able to pay school fees without her flocks.

When the same question was asked of those from the rural LGA, most participants expressed they would not be concerned. This was particularly puzzling since Ungogo LGA was one of the areas hardest hit during the bird flu epidemic, and one of the major poultry farms just minutes away continues to lie fallow of any live birds. When probed again, the children still expressed that they would not be worried. After further explanation about the ramifications of bird flu, and clarifications regarding the question itself, the girls conceded that they would be concerned if they were in Zandi’s shoes. Still, even after the initial discussion regarding bird flu at the beginning of the focus group, a couple of children continued to suggest that bird flu had not yet come to their village. The boys remained mostly indifferent, even though a few boys explained earlier in the focus group that their chickens died (during the epidemic), and their families hadn’t yet

raised enough money to replace their flocks. In all, 6 of 10 participants admitted to having recently experienced poultry deaths within their own flocks.

Both LGAs expressed concern over the fact that bird flu can infect humans. Even those participants in the rural LGA expressed little hesitation about this.

When the question regarding whether or not girls are pressured by adults to quit school in their community was asked of each group, girls from both LGAs were predictably more immediately responsive in offering their insights. In Gwale LGA, most girls empathically agreed that there was no pressure to quit school. In retrospect, it seemed that girls from this LGA may have been responding to whether or not they thought girls *should* be pressured to quit school, not whether or not they actually are, because later in the discussion, 3 of 6 specifically mentioned that they knew of girls in their own community who had been forced to leave school. Ungogo LGA expressed that girls in their community did not feel pressure to leave school. The boys in both groups expressed agreement that girls should not be limited academically, and none suggested they knew of instances where this was the case. Still, when probed again toward the end of the story about whether or not they could relate to the fact that Zandi's education was being threatened by her uncle, all seemed to think it a plausible situation in their own communities.

Both groups lit up with excitement when asked what they want to be when they grow up. Among both girls and boys, "doctor" was the most common response, followed by pilot, school teacher and nurse. None of the children spontaneously chose farming as a position to aspire to, and students from Gwale laughed at the prospect of becoming a farmer when probed. Ungogo LGA was not similarly probed. While no one volunteered wanting to be a judge, as was Zandi's aspiration in the story, though when probed in Gwale LGA, the girls found this to be a reasonable ambition. Ungogo was not probed on this point.

All participants in both groups said that they used water and soap (or dishwashing detergent, as was the case in Gwale) to wash their hands, but also indicated that ash or sand are also used as alternatives³. The use of sand appeared to be more salient among the Ungogo participants, who reported that sand was even more

³ Moderator Ayo Adesugba as a native of Nigeria suggests that the use of sand or ash, however, may not be as commonly used as water alone. Furthermore, "black" or "soda" soap, which she posits are widely available and inexpensive in her own state of origin, Ogun. The team unfortunately did not probe regarding the use of these additional alternatives, and should be introduced in additional focus group discussions.

commonly used than soap to wash one's hands, followed by soap then ash. In Gwale, children reported that soap was always used at school, and even at home. The research team had suspicions, however, that the use of soap was being emphasized over other methods among these children because of the moderator's overt expression of approval regarding use of soap over other methods, which likely introduced some bias.

Most of the girls from Gwale LGA said they did not eat the chickens they raised—one respondent explained that it was because she becomes attached to her chickens. Others (including the boys) appeared to concur with head nods and other shows of agreement. Words such as “love” and “friendly” were associated with their relationship with their fowl. The animal scientist health scientist on our team, Ms. Winnie. Emeka-Okolie, confirmed that it is common to find people who have difficulty eating the animals they raise, like rabbits, snails and poultry. Such people are usually encouraged to sell such animals and buy from the market for slaughter. Another participant expressed that the home grown chicken were not as tender as those sold in the market, and two nearby respondents nodded their heads in apparent agreement.

When asked how many chicken their families might typically keep (pre-bird flu), participants from Gwale LGA reported keeping more than twice as many live birds as those from Ungogo. Nearly all participants in both focus groups reported raising “free range” chicken on their compounds, though those from the rural focus group acknowledged that chicken were also free to wander into their households, and did so with some regularity. Those from Gwale either did not experience this practice, or were hesitant to admit it. Both groups reported keeping chicken enclosed in their “own compound” or within enclosed cages during the night.

When probed about the kind of chicken run that Zandi suggests constructing in the storybook, most agree that there is ample space on their properties to build such a fence. Those from Gwale LGA reported that finding grasses and reeds, as done by Zandi, would be difficult to do in their community, while those in Ungogo seemed to think it not as much of a challenge. Both groups, however, agreed that building an enclosed space using “zinc” (corrugated metal), wood and concrete blocks was preferable. Participants from Gwale seemed to find this a more culturally appropriate alternative, whereas those in Ungogo just thought it more practical (more durable). When asked whether or not there might be any reasons that a covered chicken run would be difficult to construct, one boy from Gwale

suggested that his parents would not allow it because the ensuing heat (resulting from the cover) would harm the chickens.

Participants were then probed on how families in their communities feed their poultry. In reaction to the storybook where Zandi raises maggots for her fowl, only one girl from the Gwale group was aware that maggots (which the Group called worms) could be used to feed chicken, whereas pupils from Ungogo were completely unaware of this practice. Among those participants from Ungogo who reported feeding their chickens anything at all (only 3 of 7, suggesting that others allow their fowl to subsist through free-range scratching), millet and rice were most commonly reported. A composite of crayfish and corn flour was also reported by one boy. Participants from Gwale did not offer any specific foods used, though most all reported that they were responsible for feeding their chickens.

Neither group had a problem identifying with the idea that there is a widely recognized hierarchy of leadership among those in their community, which is significant since impressing this leadership is the key motivation for the uncle's behavior in Zandi's Song. Participants from both LGAs suggested that there were different layers of local leadership, though the village head referred in the storybook was named "Da Ga Chi" in both groups.

Participants expressed that it was not unusual to hear drums beating in their own villages, just as Zandi hears when she is being harkened back home in the last line of the storybook. Drums are particularly heard during festivals and other special events, and respondents from Gwale clarified that drums are usually only heard during such occasions. The children from Gwale called the drums "ganga," while the term "gangi" was used by the Ungogo group.

Upon conclusion of the storybook, children were asked some general questions about how well they liked the book, and how well they felt the story of Zandi resonated with them in their own life situations.

Most all participants reported having liked the story very much. However, one boy and one girl from Ungogo LGA (ages 13 and 14 respectively) reported that the story made them sad because it reminded them of the recent bird flu die-offs experienced in their own community. When asked which parts they liked best, one girl from each focus group commented with the close relationship Zandi had with her mother and aunt, and another from Ungogo said that she liked how

Zandi' was "a clever girl" in dealing with her uncle's difficult ways, connoting that at least some students were able to follow even this deep level of nuance despite the perceived language barrier. Other themes mentioned by a couple of children included liking how the teacher played an active role in teaching her class about bird flu, and how Zandi and her friend Paul took the initiative to build their own chicken run. Nearly all children in both groups commented that they liked how the story taught them how to prevent their own birds from getting sick. In fact, the book appeared to introduce entirely novel information regarding many aspects of bird flu to nearly all the children participating in this project.

Nearly all participants expressed being able to identify with Zandi and her plight. For instance, all the girls and 3 of the boys from the Ungogo group, emphatically agreed that they had an unkind uncle, just as Zandi did in the story. And while no one from the Gwale group reported a similar family foe, all children from both LGAs related to this aspect of Zandi's family dynamics. Furthermore, while none of the children seemed to related their families' fowl raising activities with their ability to attend classes, they did seem to recognize the important role that raising (and selling) chicken played within their own household economics. When probed directly on this matter, both groups agreed that while they did not have to pay school tuitions, the loss of household family poultry production would make (or has already made) it difficult to pay for books and other school-related expenses, which was Zandi's primary concern in the book.

When asked to carefully review the clothing of those depicted in the reader, no one in either group replied unaided to the fact that the women did not have head covers (or *hijabs* as they are called locally). The children were first questioned more generally about local costume, and all seemed to feel that the garb illustrated was reminiscent of that worn in their own communities. However, when asked directly if they would prefer the girls in the story to be illustrated using hijabs, all the girls in the Ungogo group and 3 of the boys in the Gwale group stated without hesitation a specific preference for this. While most students agreed that they would prefer the females in the story to be wearing hijabs, all students from both groups said that the absence of hijabs did not detract from their enjoyment of the story, and that they could appreciate the images regardless of whether hijabs were illustrated or not. When probed directly on skin color, facial features, hair styles and surrounding village scenes, most expressed that the characters "looks like us"; no one expressed a concern about being able to identify with the characters in the story as they appeared in the drawings.

When asked if the reading of Zandi's Song may have inspired children to do something about bird flu, most everyone expressed enthusiasm and positive attitudes in both groups. Two (2) boys and 1 girl in Ungogo, and 1 girl in Gwale specifically mentioned that they would be inspired to better care for their birds in protecting them against the disease.

Discussions were concluded with taking a poll on which culturally common names children would suggest to replace the Kenyan names used in the text. For Zandi's brother Nicholas, the names most preferred were Ahmed, Umar and Nasir. Zandi's pet dog: Zimba, Rambo, and Tiger. Zandi's neighbor Paul: Ibrahim and Ismail. Zandi's teacher: Mrs. Aliyu, Mrs. Salisu and Mrs. Abubakar. Zandi's friend Jackson: Abubakar and Hamir.

Finally, when probed on having Zandi's Song translated into Hausa, there appeared to be unanimous agreement among all participants in both groups that they would prefer to read the book in English rather than Hausa. This was curious given the apparent difficulty the Ungogo group seemed to have following the story and discussions in English, but testimonial to the great plasticity and daring of children.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, it is clear that the Zandi's Song Project has enlightened and excited its participants regarding bird flu. The lack of information that continues to plague Nigerian communities, as evidenced by the research activities presented here, further supports the need for materials such as Zandi's Song to be circulated widely throughout Nigeria.

Overall, research findings suggest that those children participating in the focus groups could relate well to both the character of Zandi, as well as the details surrounding her life's story. The research team is hopeful that with some slight adaptations to make the materials more culturally appropriate for Nigerian children, the Zandi Song reader will be very successful in educating Nigerian youth about the dangers of bird flu, and inspire them to act as conduits of change within their own communities.

The Zandi's Song Team is making the following recommendations for adapting the Zandi's Song reader and supporting materials in order to achieve optimal

cultural identification among Nigerian children. As stated throughout this report, these recommendations are preliminary in nature, and may be amended based on findings from additional focus groups conducted in at least 1 other predominantly Muslim community, and 3 Christian-dominant communities.

- The name “Zandi” should be changed to a name more culturally appropriately, such as “Zainab” or “Aisha”, which were recommended by participants from the Ungogo and Gwale LGA’s.

Likewise, the names of all the characters referenced in the Zandi’s Song reader should be changed to common Nigerian names. The names most preferred were: Ahmed, Umar and Nasir for Zandi’s brother, Zimba, Rambo, and Tiger for Zandi’s pet dog, Ibrahim and Ismail for Zandi’s neighbor, Mrs. Aliyu, Mrs. Salisu and Mrs. Abukakar for Zandi’s teacher and Abubakar and Hamir for Zandi’s friend Jackson.

Furthermore, for the English version of the book, those places in the book where the local Kenyan language appear should be changed to either Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo, depending of where materials are slated for distribution. These words include name of the bus (located on page 7 of the reader), local drum (pg. 27), the term of endearment used for the goat (pg. 6), and the village the village “headman” (pg. 24). Suggestions for some local Hausa terms are provided in the Findings section of this report.

- Substitute Zandi’s meal of rice and eggs for *yam* and eggs.
- Describe the “quilts” illustrated in the story as “floor mats”, which are much more commonly used and made by hand in Nigerian communities (note: within Nigerian culture, however, these are usually made by men rather than women).
- Use the local term for “domestic” (rather than “pet”) to describe Paul’s relationship with his dog, or simply refer to the animal as “Paul’s dog” and circumvent the confusing concept altogether.
- Consider replacing Zandi’s career ambition of becoming a judge with being a doctor (or at least further test what the desirability of becoming a judge/lawyer is among girls).

- In recognizing the lack of resources and customs for hand washing at the local level, suggest using sand or ash as alternatives if soap is not available (though first get clearance from a subject matter expert on the effectiveness of these methods in eliminating the virus from hands).
- In addition to the grasses and reeds that Zandi proposes building a chicken run with, “zinc” (corrugated metal) for a roof, and wood, concrete and adobe might also be suggested since these are reportedly the building materials most often used among those from the communities under study.
- On page 12 of the reader, replace the first three sentences in the paragraph beginning with “The bird flu” [paragraph 3] with: “The bird flu has already arrived in Nigeria, Zandi. The migratory birds are coming from Asia where the bird flu has killed millions of birds. They have even passed the flu on to our poultry.”
- While children said they liked the illustrations in the Zandi’s Song text, and reported that they were able to identify with the characters in the story as they appeared in the drawings, a number of children did admit when specifically asked that they would prefer to have the females drawn with the traditional Muslim head covering. As such, if resources allow, it is recommended that the illustrations in the Hausa version of the text be altered to reflect this localism.
- The AI prevention poster on page 14 of the reader recommends talking to local authorities regarding vaccination of poultry against AI. However, the Nigerian Government presently has a policy of not vaccinating poultry. One may want to consider eliminating this recommendation (and perhaps substituting for another one) in order to avoid the potential for mixed messages and confusion.
- All participants indicated that they would prefer to read the storybooks in English, and that they not be translated into Hausa. However, because the Zandi’s Song materials were designed to communicate important AI messages, we recommend that particularly for the younger children, local language versions be made available.

Having made this recommendation, we also recognize that due to the lack of local resources, many such public health materials introduced into the

local school systems in Africa double as materials for teaching children how to read. If some copies of ZS are made available in English, the application of these materials can double as both an AI prevention tool and an English as a second language instruction material.

- Further testing of the book (at least 1 additional focus group) in a Hausa-speaking community should be conducted with the services of a professional translator. Furthermore, at least 3 additional focus groups should be conducted among predominantly Christian communities in Nigeria. Depending on the results of those findings, one may be able to justify creating 2 separate versions of the reader (one for Muslims and one for Christians), or if enough common ground can be reached, create a single version that will serve all Nigerian children.

LIMITATIONS

Throughout the exercise, students in both groups were remarkably well behaved, and even timid, which impeded a rhythmic flow of discussion among participants. One also got the impression that even in the more linguistically competent Gwale group, some words in the story were not well comprehended (such as, “ferocious”, “scream”, etc.). This was expressed directly by students at the end of the story when participants were asked if there was anything they didn’t understand or like about the story. With Ungogo LGA, due to lower than expected levels of comprehension of the English language, for some students comprehension of parts of the story appeared to be nearly entirely obfuscated, and full participation in the exercise was quite limited, despite the translation services that were provided.

The use of a research team that was to some degree unpractised in in-depth qualitative research methodology may have in some instances biased participant responses. However, the debriefing that followed each focus group was aimed at improving research protocol and helping to interpret and decipher notes that may have been less than complete.

As with all qualitative research, the focus group finding presented here are not representative all of Nigerian children, nor of Nigerian children within Kano State. However, with additional research, a “saturation point” of information for the themes explored in this study can be reached and general consensus surmised.

ZANDI'S SONG FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH PROTOCOL

**Used for focus group research training activities conducted in Kano State,
September 18-22, 2006**



**Drafted by Dr. Jodie Abbatangelo-Gray
CDC Consultant**

Introduction

The moderator will spend the first couple of minutes introducing the research team and explaining the purpose of the discussion. Use the “introduction” section from the Discussion Guide document to lead you through this discussion. Let them know we will spend about 2 hours together.

Icebreaker

Read out loud the “animal” question listed in the Discussion Guide, and encourage elaboration on why it’s their favorite!

Research Protocol (broken down by role)

Note that in the Kano phase of our research, there will be 1 moderator, 2 verbal note takers and 1 non-verbal note taker (who will also assist the moderator in guiding discussions when necessary and keep check on the audio recorder).

MODERATOR (and Reader of Storybook)

Introduction:

You will not only be reading Zandi’s Song to the children, but you will be acting as the key moderator for discussion. As such, wherever you see an arrow in the left hand margin of the reader⁴, you should pause and ask the corresponding question found in the Discussion Guide document. In this way, you will alternate between reading the storybook and asking the questions indicted in the moderator’s Discussion Guide document. Note that the **bolded text** found throughout the Discussion Guide indicates information that should be read aloud to participants.

Questions in the Discussion Guide are linked up to the storybook text using page numbers. For instance, a page number will be provided in the Discussion Guide, followed by one or more questions that are meant to be asked after reading up to the arrow in the reader on the corresponding page. If the reader has two arrows on a page, there will be a space between each block of questions in the Discussion Guide, indicating that the first block of questions corresponds to the first arrow on that page, and the second block of questions to the second arrow. ***You may want to cross off questions in the Discussion Guide with a pen as you go along in order to more easily keep track as you progress through the reader.***

⁴ Note that from this point forward, the term “the reader” refers to the Zandi’s Song storybook.

The moderator (and the non-verbal note taker) should have a watch on hand to track time in order to ensure there is enough time to cover all the topics of interest.

Be warned-- your role in this process is one of the most challenging! You will be tasked with both eliciting detailed information, keeping the conversation on topic and ensuring that all topics can be covered within the time allotted (1 ½ hours). You will also need to be able to think on your feet since you will be responsible for creative questioning that can elicit in-depth information. Very challenging indeed!

Getting Started:

After delivering the introduction and conducting the icebreaker exercise, ask the “Kick Off” questions on page 1 of the discussion guide.

Once you have completed the “Kicking off the story” section of the Discussion Guide, and the children have agreed on a culturally appropriate substitute for “Zandi”, you will use this newly selected name throughout the storytelling. The name “Zandi” should be highlighted throughout the reader in order to aid the reader in identifying and replacing that name as it occurs in the text (see “Preparing the Reader for Research” on page 8 of this Research Protocol Guide for more details on how to prep the reader for research).

The purpose of replacing Zandi’s name with the newly selected name is that we do not want to constantly distract our listeners with a name that does not resonate with their local norms. Doing so may potentially bias the interpretation of other parts of the story that might otherwise be considered culturally appropriate by Nigerian standards. This is particularly important since the purpose of this study is to adapt Zandi’s Song in a way that is culturally acceptable to Nigerian children.

Once you have determined what you will call “Zandi” for the rest of the story, ***review the ground rules*** with participants before proceeding with the reading of the storybook.

The ground rules are as follows:

- There should be no talking while the reader is telling the story, and all comments must be shared with the group (no private conversations or chatting with ones’ friends during the focus group session)
- All listeners are to be respectful of what others have to say. Criticizing or ridiculing one another will not be tolerated! ;^)
- All responses are to be kept confidential. Information shared during the sessions should not be shared outside of the focus group setting.

- The “Rule of One” should be kept in mind at all times. While we want to hear from everyone, we need to wait our turn to speak. Otherwise, the note takers will not be able to keep up with the comments, and the tape recorder will play back an undecipherable, jumbled mess!
- Speak loudly and clearly! This is critical in order for note-takers to do their jobs well and group interactions to occur. Take care to create an environment of trust and confidence that will help to encourage this behavior.

Handout copies of the storybook for use among focus group participants. Explain to children that they must treat the books gently as they will be re-used by other children in future groups.

Six bound, partially laminated color copies of Zandi’s Song were produced for use among the Kano participants, allowing 2 children per book. These copies were left behind at CDC Nigeria headquarters. For future focus groups, these same books can be used. If for some reason these books have been removed or destroyed, new copies should be made using the original pdf of the reader available at <http://avianflu.aed.org/zandi.htm>. Take care that the reproduction quality is as good as possible. A poor quality reader may result in information bias during the pre-testing research phase of the project.

Begin reading the storybook. As described in detail earlier in this section, the moderator will be responsible for reading the story, as well as for stopping at intervals along the way to ask questions in tandem with the Discussion Guide document. As such, *someone who can read **clearly and with real passion and excitement** should be encouraged to take on this role!* Again, the reader will be prompted by arrows imbedded within the left hand margin of the storybook text to pause and ask pre-formulated questions. Read up until the arrow before asking the questions indicated on the Discussion Guide. Do not ask the “PROBE” questions until respondents have been given an opportunity to respond to the initial question. Be sure to allow enough time for a comprehensive response from the group before proceeding to the next question.

The point of probing is to elicit deeper information by assisting respondents through the thought process. You do not need to limit yourself to the questions and probes provided in the discussion guide. If you feel that after asking the questions from the Discussion Guide you have still not received an in-depth or appropriate amount of information, come up with additional line of thinking on your own.

Also, be sure to encourage inter-group dialogue . . . the strength of the focus group methodology is that respondents will be able to react to one another’s comments in a group setting, which can result in a better understanding of the “consensus thinking” on a particular topic of interest. While we still need to enforce the “Rule of One” to

ensure that note takers can accurately record responses, you should also encourage controlled dialogue among the children. This may necessitate phrases such as “*and what do you think about what Islam said, Faozat? Do you agree with him? Why?*” This line of questioning is particularly useful in bringing into the fold children who are shy or are contributing substantially less to the conversation than others.

Once again, keep in mind that while the research protocol is fairly structured, the methodology we are using is a focus group, and as such *you should encourage full and rich responses from each of your listeners*. Use the probes suggested within the Discussion Guide in order to help bring about the full range of responses. Also, do not be afraid to use some of your own probes if you are not getting the full, expected responses to a question.

Once you have completed the storybook, follow up with the “End of Story” questions listed in the Discussion Guide.

Once you have completed the “End of Story” questions, sum up final discussions and invite children to partake in refreshments! Collect readers from children. For the Kano groups, children will be gifted with colorful swatches of fabric that could be used as lower body wraps that are typical of traditional Nigerian dress. Also, handout the two pre-printed color bird flu prevention posters (one each per child) as a “thank you.”

Be sure to thank the children for their contributions and remind them of the important contributions they’ve made!

**TAKE AS MUCH TIME AS NECESSARY TO ADDRESS ANY CONCERNS
THAT THE CHILDREN MAY HAVE REGARDING BIRD FLU!**

NOTE TAKERS- VERBAL

Unlike the moderator, your role will be to take complete, accurate and copious notes. This entails being able to write or type very quickly, write and listen at the same time, and to record *near verbatim* as is being said. The role of the note taker is NOT to interpret what is important enough to write down—the note taker is to write down EVERY comment, no matter how seemingly insignificant. Interpretation comes later, once the full transcript is laid out in front of us.

This is a particularly challenging role, especially in a focus group setting where a number of people may be talking at once. In these instances, you can remind children

about the “Rule of One,” and ask respondents to repeat what they have said if you are having a hard time keeping up (however, try not to make this a habit as it can impede the group dynamic and flow of ideas).

You must record not only what the children say, but the question that was asked of them by the moderator. *Note that what the moderator says does NOT need to be verbatim . . .* in fact, it can be very abbreviated and filled in later (using the Discussion Guide).

The overarching goal is to write notes that are as complete as possible so that a reader not present at the focus group could understand from reading your notes what precisely was said and done during the session.

Warning: The role of the notetaker is very intensive! Plus, it is one of the most important roles to play in the research process since all of the interpretations we glean from our research are based directly on how well you were able to capture the data—near verbatim!! Whoever chooses to take on this role must have an excellent command of writing under pressure, and the ability to think on one’s feet for up to 2 hours at a time! (2 hours is the usual amount of time a focus group will take).

Getting Started:

You should begin taking notes from the very beginning of the session. Begin with recording the name, age and gender of each participant. Begin recording participant responses beginning with the icebreaker activity, and finish once the moderator has finished with all of his/her questions and the children themselves have stopped providing commentary.

For the most part, we try to identify who said what by using codes. Each child will not only have a name tag on, but a large number corresponding to their age written below. When taking notes, do not record the child’s name; we only record the number (age) and “B” for boy, or “G” for girl. This is done both to save time, as well as to ensure the confidentiality of our participants.

Notes should always be written in the first person. In other words, if “Philomena 12” says, “I really liked how Zandi was able to trick her uncle into letting her stay in school.” Your notes would read:

“G12: I really liked how Zandi was able to (ps3) trick her uncle into letting her stay in school (Lf).”

You’ll note there are a couple of additional codes included in this note above: “ps3” and “Lf”. These stand for “pause for 3 seconds” and “laugh” respectively. We do this in order to capture the *flavor* of a statement because as behavioral researchers we

want to catch not only the words that are spoken, but the expressions that go along with them. I encourage note takers to use whichever codes work for them, but here is a suggested list:

Pause plus time= ps #
Laugh= Lf
Huff (or show of indignation)= hf
Grunt/groan= gr

Whichever codes you use, the important thing is to be consistent so that you do not forget what you mean by your own codes!

Note that it is standard practice to “comb” or edit the transcript you have created directly after the focus group has ended. This is important so that you can fill in gaps and make clarifications while the session is still fresh in your mind.

NOTE TAKER: NON-VERBAL RESPONSES

What we mean by non-verbal cues are facial expressions (such as a look of concern, confusion, amusement, engagement, boredom, etc.), as well as body language and other non-verbal expressions (laughter, etc.). You are also responsible for narrating any activities that are conducted within the focus group setting.

You will not need to record every single non-verbal expression for every child—this would be impossible! Concentrate on recording those cues that have relevance to the goals of the project. *Any expression that gives meaning and context to a statement, for instance, is relevant to pre-testing Zandi’s Song, and thus should be recorded!* You will also note individual level non-verbal cues that are “noteworthy” . . . *those cues considered noteworthy are any forms of expression that stand out from a simple passive listening posture.*

Warning: This is a particularly challenging role because one needs to become sensitive to picking up on non-verbal cues, which requires an intense amount of concentration and discernment. Whoever chooses to fill this role should have good eyesight, and the ability to accurately record expressions and body language as they correspond to the storybook.

Getting started:

The role of the non-verbal note taker is a challenging one because non-verbal responses need to be recorded in such a way that can later be mapped on to verbal

responses. That is why your version of the storybook should have each paragraph numbered sequentially in the left hand margin of the text (see the “Preparing the Reader for Research” section on page 8 of this Research Protocol Guide for more details).

For example, if the moderator is reading passage #49, and suddenly the group breaks out in laughter, your notes should read:

49, 6: 5 children break into laughter regarding mention of boy falling into trap. B12, B14, B11, G10, G13.

The “49” indicates the paragraph number that is recorded in the left hand side of the margin, and the “6” indicates that laughter broke out right around line six of that paragraph. The B12, B14, B11, G10 relate to the individual participants who responded with laughter. To eliminate confusion, it is also a good idea to write what piece in particular the children are responding to within the storybook, as demonstrated above.

The person responsible for recording non-verbal cues will also be paying close attention to the questioning and probing patterns of the moderator, and offer additional probes when appropriate. This rightly falls to the non-verbal note taker because second to the moderator, you will be most in a position to be following the logical thread of the discussion. As such, you should review the description for the moderator detailed in the Research Protocol Guide regarding how to elicit rich, deep information, but also how to keep a discussion moving forward so that all the required topics can be covered within the limited time frame we have (1 ½- 2 hours).

Both the moderator and the non-verbal note taker should have a watch on hand to track time in order to ensure there is enough time to cover all the topics of interest.

Finally, keeping track of the voice recorder (flipping the tape over at half time for instance) is also the responsibility of the non-verbal note taker.

WRAP UP

After the focus group is completed, all researchers (moderator and verbal/non-verbal note takers) should participate in the dissemination of enlightenment materials (AED pre-printed posters and MOAg materials).

PREPARING THE ZANDI'S SONG READER FOR RESEARCH

The following edits should be made to the original Zandi's Song reader before commencing research activities. An original pdf version of the reader can be downloaded at <http://avianflu.aed.org/zandi.htm>.

A log of the suggested edits are provided (rather than the edited text itself), since the reader used in the Kano study had to be marked up by hand even though an electronic record is preferable [the Word version of the reader provided by AED does not follow the page breaks and does not have the images as in the original book, which would make it difficult for the moderator to lead her focus group participants through their own readers]. The research lead of this project has thus decided to provide the edits below for application and permanent record. The following edits to the original pdf of the reader should not take more than 10 minutes to apply.

◇ Number sequentially each paragraph/partial paragraph/free standing sentence throughout the reader. The numbers will be used as reference points for non-verbal note-takers. You should have labeled about 96 “paragraphs” in total. NOTE: Even partial paragraphs (e.g., line(s) from a paragraph that continues from a previous page) should be given their own number in order to eliminate the need for non-verbal note takers to flip back and forth between pages while trying to take notes.

◇ Insert arrows in the left-hand side margin of the reader at the points listed below. These will serve as indicators for the moderator to stop and ask questions. Arrows should be inserted at the end of the following paragraphs⁵:

- Page 4, paragraph 3
- Page 5, paragraph 3
- Page 5, paragraph 4
- Page 8, paragraph 2
- Page 9, paragraph 3
- Page 12, paragraph 5
- Page 13, after graphic of “What We Can Do” poster
- Page 17, paragraph 5
- Page 18, paragraph 2
- Page 18, paragraph 3
- Page 24, paragraph 4
- Page 26, paragraph 3
- Page 27, paragraph 1

◇ Highlight all instances in the text where the name “Zandi” appears. This will help aid the moderator in exchanging the name “Zandi” for the new name selected by the group at the beginning of the focus group activities.

⁵ Note that we are using the same definition for “paragraph” as detailed in the bullet above.

◇ On page 12 of the reader, replace the first three sentences in the paragraph beginning with “The bird flu” [paragraph 3] with: “The bird flu has already arrived in Nigeria, Zandi. The migratory birds are coming from Asia where the bird flu has killed millions of birds. They have even passed the flu on to our poultry.”

POST FOCUS GROUP PREPARATION OF RESEARCH TRANSCRIPTS AND REPORT DRAFTING

Upon completion of the focus group, researchers should review their notes and fill in details where necessary. This is a critical step to complete soon after the activities have ended so that important details do not get lost. Within the next 24 hours, all researchers should then meet to review their notes together. One of the verbal note takers should lead discussion by reading through their notes starting at the beginning of the session. Other notes takers (verbal and non-verbal) would be encouraged after each question answered to contribute their own findings for that topic. The note taker leading the discussion should include these additional notes into the final transcript. If there is disagreement about what is heard or seen, majority should rule.

Using the final transcripts from each focus group, the researcher responsible for drafting the final report should organize findings by topic (using the questions from the Focus Group Discussion Guide as guide). When drafting results, one should look for similarities across focus groups, but report findings with caution. Because focus groups use a non-representative sample, we can make assertions that we have likely “captured the pulse” of Nigerian youth in the north, but we cannot say that findings are indicative of all youth ages 10-14 in Kano State. The final report should include specific recommendations regarding how Zandi’s Song might best be adapted to suit the Nigerian context. Recommendations should also offer guidance on whether or not additional research may be necessary to support one’s initial research findings. Typically, 3 focus groups are enough to reach a “point of saturation” (the point at which information begins repeating itself). However, since we are looking to adapt this book for use among all Nigerian children, not just those from the predominantly Muslim communities of the North, we already know we will be recommending that additional studies be conducted in the Lagos region of the country.

See the Zandi’s Song Project “Final Findings Report” for ideas on how to present findings. Headings (in order of suggested appearance) include: Team Introduction, Background, Project Objectives, Methods, Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations and Study Limitations.

Background Reading for Qualitative Research Methodology Used as a Primer for Testing Zandi's Song

The following research definitions were adapted from *Wikipedia*:

A **focus group** is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members.

Qualitative research is one of the two major approaches to research methodology in the social sciences. Qualitative research involves an indepth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research relies on reasons behind various aspects of behavior. Simply put, it investigates the **why** and **how** of decision making, as compared to **what**, **where**, and **when** of quantitative research. Hence, the need is for smaller but focused samples rather than large and random samples.

In the social sciences, focus groups allow interviewers to study people in a more natural setting than a one-to-one interview. In combination with **participant observation**, they can be used for gaining access to various cultural and social groups, selecting sites to study, sampling of such sites, and raising unexpected issues for exploration. Focus groups are low in cost, one can get results relatively quickly, and they can increase the sample size of a report by talking with several folks at once. (Material based on: Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3rd Ed. London: Sage Publications, 1999, p. 115)

However, focus groups also have disadvantages: The researcher has less control over a group than a one-on-one interview, and thus time can be lost on issues irrelevant to the topic; the data are tough to analyze because the talking is in reaction to the comments of other group members; observers/ moderators need to be highly trained, and groups are quite variable and can be tough to get together.

Participant observation is a major research strategy which aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals (such as a religious, occupational, or deviant group) and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment. The method originated in field work of social anthropologists and in the urban research of the Chicago School.

Such research usually involves a range of methods: informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, collective discussions, analyses of the personal documents produced within the group, self-analysis, and life-histories. Thus, although the method is generally characterized as qualitative research, it can (and often does) include quantitative dimensions. Participant observation is usually undertaken over an extended period of time, ranging from several months to many

years. An extended research time period means that the researcher will be able to obtain more detailed and accurate information about the people he/she is studying. Observable details (like daily time allotment) and more hidden details (like taboo behaviour) are more easily observed and understandable over a longer period of time.

A variant of participant observation is "observing participation," which is the methodology that best describes how we will track non-verbal cues during the focus groups we conduct for Zandi's Song.

The following description of focus groups was adapted from an article published in "Social Research Update" by medical sociologist Anita Gibbs (Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guildford GU2 7XH, England, Winter 1997).

- Focus group research involves organized discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic.
- Focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic.
- The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation.
- Problems arise when attempting to identify the individual view from the group view, as well as in the practical arrangements for conducting focus groups.
- The role of the moderator is very significant. Good levels of group leadership and interpersonal skill are required to moderate a group successfully.

Focus groups are under-used in social research, although they have a long history in market research (Morgan 1988), and more recently in medical research (Powell & Single 1996). This *Update* examines the value of focus groups as a tool for social researchers, and considers their potential and their limitations.

What are focus groups?

Powell et al define a focus group as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of that research. (1996: 499)

Focus groups are a form of group interviewing, but it is important to distinguish between the two. Group interviewing involves interviewing a number of people at the same time, the emphasis being on questions and responses between the researcher and participants. Focus groups, however, rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher. (Morgan 1997: 12). Hence the key characteristic which distinguishes the traditional focus group is the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants.

While we still hope to achieve this group dynamic, the methods used in testing Zandi's Song will be somewhat of a hybrid between the free-flowing exploration that marks classic focus group designs and the more structured group interviewing method discussed above. As discussed in the Research Protocol document, this is because the goals of the research are to adapt an already existing story. If we were at the stage of developing a brand new story, for instance, the discussion format would be much more exploratory and less structured in orientation.

Why use focus groups and not other methods?

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails.

Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. The individual interview is easier for the researcher to control than a focus group in which participants may take the initiative. Compared to observation, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time. Observational methods tend to depend on waiting for things to happen, whereas the researcher follows an interview guide in a focus group. In this sense focus groups are not natural but organized events. *Focus groups are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals, when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic (Morgan & Kreuger 1993).* These are all key features of our testing of Zandi's Song, and thus the focus group format is an appropriate methodology.

The role of the focus group in testing Zandi's Song

The role of using the focus group methodology in testing Zandi's Song is rather specific in scope. The end result is to achieve group consensus regarding how to adapt the story being tested in a way that best achieves salience among Nigerian children.

Strengths and limitations

Kitzinger (1994, 1995) argues that interaction is the crucial feature of focus groups because the interaction between participants highlights their view of the world, the language they use about an issue and their values and beliefs about a situation. Interaction also enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences.

Another benefit is that focus groups elicit information in a way which allows researchers to find out why an issue is salient, as well as what is salient about it (Morgan 1988). As a result, the gap between what people say and what they do can be

better understood (Lankshear 1993). If multiple understandings and meanings are revealed by participants, multiple explanations of their behavior and attitudes can be more readily articulated.

The benefits of focus group research to participants should not be underestimated. The opportunity to be involved in decision making processes (Race et al 1994), to be valued as experts, and to be given the chance to work collaboratively with researchers (Goss & Leinbach 1996) can be empowering for many participants. If a group works well, trust develops and the group may explore solutions to a particular problem as a unit (Kitzinger 1995), rather than as individuals. Not everyone will experience these benefits, as focus groups can also be intimidating at times, especially for inarticulate or shy members. Hence focus groups are not empowering for all participants and other methods may offer more opportunities for participants. However if participants are actively involved in something which they feel will make a difference, and focus group research is often of an applied nature, empowerment can realistically be achieved.

Another advantage of focus groups to clients, users, participants or consumers is that they can become a forum for change (Race et al 1994), both during the focus group meeting itself and afterwards. For example, in research conducted by Goss & Leinbach (1996), the participants in the research experienced a sense of emancipation through speaking in public and by developing reciprocal relationships with the researchers. The fact that empowerment might be achieved among children in the process of research proposed here is a highly desirable by-product of testing Zandi's Song— particularly given the goals of empowerment that the story's author intended.

Although focus group research has many advantages, as with all research methods there are limitations. Some can be overcome by careful planning and moderating, but others are unavoidable and peculiar to this approach. The researcher, or moderator, for example, has less control over the data produced (Morgan 1988) than in either quantitative studies or one-to-one interviewing. The moderator has to allow participants to talk to each other, ask questions and express doubts and opinions, while having very little control over the interaction other than generally keeping participants focused on the topic. By its nature focus group research is open ended and cannot be entirely predetermined.

It should not be assumed that the individuals in a focus group are expressing their own definitive individual view. They are speaking in a specific context, within a specific culture, and so sometimes it may be difficult for the researcher to clearly identify an individual message. This too is a potential limitation of focus groups.

On a practical note, focus groups can be difficult to assemble. It may not be easy to get a representative sample and focus groups may discourage certain people from participating, for example those who are not very articulate or confident, and those who have communication problems or special needs. The method of focus group discussion may also discourage some people from trusting others with sensitive or personal information. In such cases, personal interviews or the use of workbooks alongside focus groups may be a more suitable approach. Finally, focus groups are not fully confidential or anonymous, because the material is shared with the others in the group.

The practical organization of focus groups

Organizing focus group interviews usually requires more planning than other types of interviewing as getting people to group gatherings can be difficult and setting up appropriate venues with adequate recording facilities requires a lot of time.

The recommended number of people per group is usually six to ten (MacIntosh 1993), but some researchers have used up to fifteen people (Goss & Leinbach 1996) or as few as four (Kitzinger 1995). Numbers of groups vary, some studies using only one meeting with each of several focus groups (Burgess 1996), others meeting the same group several times. Focus group sessions usually last from one to two hours. *Neutral locations can be helpful for avoiding either negative or positive associations with a particular site or building (Powell & Single 1996)*. It is for this reason we have suggested a community-based “reading circle” environment for testing Zandi’s Song, rather than a classroom setting. Focus group meetings can be held in a variety of places, including people’s homes, in rented facilities, or where the participants hold their regular meetings if they are a pre-existing group.

It is not always easy to identify the most appropriate participants for a focus group. If a group is too heterogeneous, whether in terms of gender or class, or in terms of professional and ‘lay’ perspectives, the differences between participants can make a considerable impact on their contributions. Alternatively, if a group is homogenous with regard to specific characteristics, diverse opinions and experiences may not be revealed. Participants need to feel comfortable with each other. Meeting with others whom they think of as possessing similar characteristics or levels of understanding about a given topic will be more appealing than meeting with those who are perceived to be different (Morgan 1988).

When interviewing children, as we will be doing for Zandi’s Song, it will also be important to limit the number of adults in the setting, particularly teachers or other authority figure as this may lead to emotional distress for children and bias the responses they are willing to offer.

Once the type of participants have been decided, locating them is the next challenge. Recruitment of participants can be time consuming, especially if the topic under consideration has no immediate benefits or attractions to participants. It is likely that people with specific interests will have to be recruited by word of mouth (Burgess 1996), through the use of key informants, by advertising or poster campaigns (Holbrook & Jackson 1996), or through existing social networks. Incentives, whether expenses, gift vouchers or presents, will usually need to be offered.

The role of moderator

Once a meeting has been arranged, the role of moderator or group facilitator becomes critical, especially in terms of providing clear explanations of the purpose of the group, helping people feel at ease, and facilitating interaction between group members.

During the meeting moderators will need to promote debate, perhaps by asking open questions. They may also need to challenge participants, especially to draw out

people's differences, and tease out a diverse range of meanings on the topic under discussion. Sometimes moderators will need to probe for details, or move things forward when the conversation is drifting or has reached a minor conclusion. Moderators also have to keep the session focused and so sometimes they may deliberately have to steer the conversation back on course. Moderators also have to ensure everyone participates and gets a chance to speak. In limiting information bias, moderators are also encouraged not to show approval or disapproval of responses given, or indicate that some responses are more correct than others. They must avoid giving personal opinions so as not to influence participants towards any particular position or opinion.

The role of the moderator is a demanding and challenging one, and moderators will need to possess good interpersonal skills and personal qualities, being good listeners, non-judgmental and adaptable. These qualities will promote the participants' trust in the moderator and increase the likelihood of open, interactive dialogue.

Finally, the degree of control and direction imposed by moderators will depend upon the goals of the research as well as on their preferred style. If two or more moderators are involved in the facilitation of a focus group, agreement needs to be reached as to how much input or direction each will give. It is recommended that one moderator facilitates and the other takes notes and checks the recording equipment during the meeting. There also needs to be consistency across focus groups, so careful preparation with regard to role and responsibilities is required.

Ethical issues

Ethical considerations for focus groups are the same as for most other methods of social research (Homan 1991). For example, when selecting and involving participants, researchers must ensure that full information about the purpose and uses of participants' contributions is given. Being honest and keeping participants informed about the expectations of the group and topic, and not pressuring participants is good practice. A particular ethical issue to consider in the case of focus groups is the handling of sensitive material and confidentiality given that there will always be more than one participant in the group. Participants need to be encouraged to keep confidential what they hear during the meeting and researchers have the responsibility of keeping data from the group anonymous. Of particular concern to the pre-testing of Zandi's Song is the potential to raise fear among children regarding bird flu. In order to minimize anxiety, researchers must remain available after the focus group discussions to answer any questions that may arise. Furthermore, materials outlining how one might prevent bird flu must be made available for community-wide distribution.

Conclusion

This document has outlined the main features of focus group research, paying particular attention to the benefits of interaction and group dynamics which only this method can offer. Practical considerations and the time it takes to conduct focus group research may discourage many from attempting to collect data using this method. Nevertheless, those who participate in this kind of research often find the experience rewarding. The process of research can be more collaborative than other forms of

study, and so focus group research can be an empowering process for participants, and an exciting challenge for social researchers wanting to gain a different perspective on their field of interest. In regards to the testing of Zandi's Song, it is important to keep in mind that the flavor of the focus groups conducted will be more focused and less exploratory in nature given the stated goals of the research project. A closer adherence to the discussion guide is encouraged in order to ensure that feedback is gathered on portions of the story that are critical for proper adaptation into the Nigerian context.

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APPENDIX III

Discussion Guide for Zandi's Song Focus group discussions with children of Nigeria

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NOTE TO MODERATOR: Before using this guide, please read through the Research Protocol document for guidance on its logic and application. Please also review the Qualitative Research Primer provided on focus group methodology before attempting to conduct this research.

INTRODUCTION:

[EXPLAIN] We are a group of teachers and we are working on a brand new story that I'm sure you haven't heard yet. It's called "Zandi's Song." The story talks about the bird flu disease.

- Q. How many of you have heard about bird flu?
- Q. How many of you raise chickens at home?
- Q. Would you be interested in listening to a story about how a girl from Nigeria deals with the threat of bird flu?
 - Q. If "no," why not?

[EXPLAIN] The point of doing this is that we want to create a story that is relevant to you and reflects the Nigerian culture. So, we'll be asking you some questions as we read through the story to be sure we got it right.

ICEBREAKER:

Q. Okay. Before we get started, what is your favorite animal and why??
[Explain that we are NOT asking about which tastes best or what is their favorite animal to eat, but rather, their favorite animal to play with/pet or befriend.⁶]

KICKING OFF THE STORY:

⁶ Note that while some questions, probes and/or clarifications may seem odd to you, this version reflects the wisdom of interpretations and meaning gleaned from previously focus groups conducted using this tool.

- Q. Before we get started, can you tell me whether “Zandi” a common name used by girls in your community?
- Q. If you could rename this girl to reflect the names used in your own neighborhood, what would you call her?
- Q. Among the group of you, come up with a “top 3” list.

Okay, we will use the name “[SELECTED BY GROUP]” instead of Zandi for the rest of the story. At the end of the story, we will come up with some additional names for Zandi’s friends, relatives and pets too.

BEGIN READING STORY

Before we begin reading the story, I have a few rules that we all need to follow (see protocol document for details). These include:

- **No talking out of turn**
- **Be respectful of what others have to say**
- **All responses should be kept confidential**
- **The “rule of one” should be kept in mind at all times**
- **Please speak up loudly and clearly!**

Q. (PAGE 4) Does this sound like the kind of meal that would be prepared in your household? **PROBE:** How does your family typically prepare and eat their eggs?

Q. (PAGE 5) Do people stitch quilts in your village? **PROBE:** [Show picture on page 6] Do people make similar textiles by hand in your village? What would this type of item [point to quilt in the picture] be called in your village?

Q. (PAGE 5) Can anyone please explain to me what a “pet” is? [Explain concept if necessary.]

Q. Do people in your village keep dogs for pets? **PROBE:** Do you have a pet dog? Your neighbors?

Q. (PAGE 8) If you were in [NAME’S] shoes, would you be worried too? Why or why not?

Q. (PAGE 9) Do girls in your community feel pressure to quit school? If yes, What are some of the reasons that girls would be asked to leave school? **PROBE:** Marriage, work, childcare?

Q. If you could pick anything in the world, what would you like to be when you are an adult? **PROBE:** A doctor? A farmer? A lawyer? A housewife?

Q. (PAGE 12): Does knowing that bird flu can make humans sick worry you? **PROBE:** What about bird flu most worries you?

Q. (PAGE 13): How do people wash their hands in your neighborhood? **PROBE:** What do they use more commonly: ash, soap or sand? Do all of these methods require water?

Q. (PAGE 17): How many chickens (or other birds that you raise to eat) does your family typically keep? **PROBE:** If depopulated: How many before culling? How many now?

Q. Are your chickens kept in an enclosed cage, in a fenced in area, or do they run free along the streets and yards?

Q. (PAGE 18): Do you think your property is large enough to build the kind of chicken run that Zandi is describing?

Q. Can you think of any reasons why it would be hard to keep your chickens enclosed by a fence such as this in your backyard?

(PAGE 18): Okay, so Zandi is trying to figure out how to keep her chicken enclosed, and yet still keep them nourished with food.

Q. Have you ever heard of growing maggots for chicken food? **PROBE:** Do people do this in your community? **PROBE:** How does your family feed their chickens?

Q. Do your chicken eat grain from the fields around your home? If no, why not?

Q. (PAGE 24): Does your village have a village leader or leaders that people recognize as the head of your community? Explain.

If yes: What title do you give (him/ her/ group)?

Q. (PAGE 26): Would it be hard to find tall grasses and twigs to build a chicken fence near your home?

Q. What would you use to build such a fence?

Q. (PAGE 27): Do you think it's odd that [NAME] hears a drum in the distance. **PROBE:** Are drums played in your own village?

If no, What sounds might you hear as you approach your village?

END OF STORY QUESTIONS

So that is the end of our story!

Q. So what did you think of it?! **PROBE:** Did you like it? Dislike it? Think it was just okay? Why?

Q. What is your favorite part of this story? Why?

- Q.** Were there any parts of the story you didn't understand? Explain.
- Q.** Were there any part of the story that you didn't like? Explain.
- Q.** Could a girl like [NAME] be someone living in your village? **PROBE:** Do you know anyone in a similar situation as Zandi? Explain.
- Q.** Can you relate to [NAME]? Why or why not?
PROBE: How is [NAME's] Life similar to or different from yours?
PROBE: Do you have a mean uncle? (icebreaker: said with humor)
PROBE: Do you raise chickens?
Sub-PROBE: What do you do to help raise your families chickens? (feed them, clean the cages, collect eggs, play with them??)
PROBE: Does your family depend on poultry for household income?
PROBE: Do you or other children in your school have a hard time paying for school fees?

Now we'd like for you to flip through the pages of the story books in front of you. Take some time to notice the drawings. [Depending on the response, you may want to lead them through page by page.]

- Q.** Do you like the drawings that are used in the story? What do you like/dislike about them?
- Q.** Do these people look similar to the people in your own village? Explain.
PROBE: How about the clothing and hairstyles?

Okay, now let's talk for a minute about bird flu.

- Q.** Did you learn anything new about bird flu from reading this story? What?
- Q.** Did hearing "[NAME's]" story inspire you to take some action in your own village to prevent bird flu?
PROBE: What actions might you take? Discuss.

Characters to rename

- Q.** I now want you to come up with some replacement names for the following characters that we've read about. Remember, we want to use Nigerian names that children from your own village could easily recognize.

Brother: Nicholas

Pet dog: Simba
Neighbor: Paul
Teacher: Mrs. Muchunu
Friend: Jackson

FINAL Q. Does anyone have any questions or worries that you would like to talk about?

That sums up our activities here today, children. Thank you so much for participating in our story circle!!