Qualitative Research Methods
for Use in Equity-focused Monitoring

unite for children

unicef

Qualitative Research Methods
for Use in Equity-focused Monitoring

Table of Contents

1. Introduction[1]

The principles of participation and social inclusion are integral to UNICEF's 'equity focused' programming approach and human rights based approach to programming more generally. It is assumed that programmes which promote and protect the human rights of all will be sustainable only to the extent that they engage meaningfully and ethically with all persons, including marginalised populations or groups, in creating their own change.

Accordingly, programme planning, monitoring, and evaluation require effective assessments that are in accord with UNICEF's equity re-focus and human rights based approach. Such assessments are part of every phase of UNICEF programming, from the initial situation analysis through to the final evaluation. Participatory monitoring approaches with continuously reflective learning processes can do this by offering opportunities for the voices of the excluded[2], including children and adolescents, to be heard and heeded by planners and policy makers.

The purpose of this document is to strengthen and support equity-focused monitoring. As qualitative methods can assist UNICEF staff and programme partners to obtain a more comprehensive picture of programme progress and bottlenecks that may be facilitating or impeding desired outcomes, including for the most disadvantaged and marginalised, it is a central feature of the equity-focused monitoring strategies outlined here.

Accordingly, this document provides an overview of qualitative, participatory research methods that may be employed to gather data, monitor and analyse UNICEF supported interventions, particularly the enabling environment, and supply and demand determinants in the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES) framework relating to social norms and socio-cultural practices and behaviours.

The document provides a brief description of different qualitative methods for programme monitoring. It is not meant to be an exhaustive review of qualitative research methods but illustrative. It is intended to serve as a reference for UNICEF programme staff and partners to help make more informed decisions on which methods to use and when, according to their needs and to the contexts in which they work. It may also serve as an accelerated first-step to guide country offices on the selection of key qualitative methods. Qualitative data collection and analysis require skill sets that UNICEF and partners may not have in-house. It is also important to note that in many cases qualitative research, particularly participatory approaches, requires the active involvement of participants who often can provide relevant insights and complement the work of the research team. Therefore, experts may need to be brought on board to undertake the work. While there are several approaches that programmes can use to engage these tools, this document focuses on key methods that can be carried out by country offices with limited resources and country capacity.

The selection of which methods to use must be based on local realities and contexts, meaning

---

1   This document was written by Dr. Suzanne Hanchett, Consultant, UNICEF New York, t, October 2011, in collaboration with UNICEF HQ C4D Section. Further revisions reflect UNICEF COs/ROs comments and inputs from David Conrad, UNICEF HQ C4D Unit Volunteer.
2   Be it socially, economically, or politically excluded, for example.

that these decisions rest at the UNICEF country office level as well as the local (e.g., district) level where the study or assessment is being conducted. Partners should be brought on board from the beginning of this exercise and country offices should consider hiring experts for support. Partnerships with local academic institutions with expertise in qualitative methods, for instance, would be helpful.

1.1 What is 'Qualitative Research' and how can it add value?

This guide describes 13 types of qualitative research methods and data gathering tools that may be used for equity-focused monitoring across all stages of programme planning and implementation. There are two major types of research methods: qualitative and quantitative. Researchers choose qualitative or quantitative methods according to the nature of the research topic they want to investigate and the research questions they aim to answer. Qualitative research involves asking a broad question and collecting data in the form of words, images, video, etc., that is then analysed searching for themes. This type of research aims to investigate a question without attempting to quantifiably measure variables or look to potential relationships between variables. Research tools can be defined as the instruments in the hands of qualitative researchers for measuring what they intend to in their study.

The qualitative methods and tools described in this guide have been widely used across all sectors in the development field. However, it is important to remember that the process of selecting specific methods and data gathering tools should be flexible, participatory, and consistent with the programme context, approach, and the principles of participation and inclusion. As a result, this guide also includes links to references that provide further information on how to use each method and data gathering tool.

Qualitative research is intended to provide an in-depth understanding of the contexts in which people make decisions and live their lives – their thoughts, values, beliefs, and habitual practices. Achieving high 'validity', often referred to in qualitative research as 'credibility', means that there should be a close fit between the qualitative data (e.g., data collected from interviews, transcripts from focus group discussions, and notes from observation) and what people actually say, think, and do. People are not scientifically 'objective' about their own perceptions or lives, but it is the responsibility of the researcher to describe the sample population's perceptions and attitudes as accurately as possible while being aware of his/her own 'subjectivity' (thereby adjusting for his or her own perceptions and biases as well). In some circumstances, many different researchers may be involved in analysing a particular situation. To account for this, most comprehensive reports will triangulate data from a variety of methods (so it cross-checks against each other) to demonstrate a high level of credibility and examine different social positions, relationships, and points of view as carefully as possible.

It is important to understand that qualitative methods are particularly helpful to answer questions of 'how' and 'why' phenomena exist or occur. Quantitative methods (such as surveys that use probability sampling methods) are helpful when you want to find out the magnitude or scale of an issue and are often better placed to answer questions of 'what', 'where', 'when', and 'how many'. When used in combination, assessments and analysis that combine qualitative and quantitative data can provide a more comprehensive picture of the 'how' and 'why' along with the 'magnitude' to guide programme planning, implementation, and adjustments.

Qualitative research methods and data collection tools tend to be flexible. Often characterized as housing an 'emergent design', these methods and tools provide a space for information to emerge unexpectedly and for qualitative research activities to adapt accordingly.

As mentioned in the introduction, qualitative methods are especially well suited for the collection of two types of social information: social norms and social/cultural practices and beliefs.

A social norm and social and cultural attitude or practice can be defined as follows:

- A social norm is a context-specific rule of behavior. The behaviour of individuals is conditioned by their beliefs about how others expect them to behave. In other words, individuals believe that others who matter to them expect them to follow the rule and vice-versa (normative expectations). There is a social pressure in place. Not following the rule of behaviour may result in reprimand, shame or exclusion (some form of social punishment) or may also result in praise or acceptance (some form of social reward).

- A social and cultural attitude or practice is defined as not driven by the belief that it is expected by others (if this belief were present it would be a social norm). It may reflect independent personal positions (personal normative beliefs) irrespective of what others think or do. It may also be the result of observation of what others do and/or expectation of what others will do (empirical expectation). Social and cultural beliefs, attitudes, and practices are part of a larger ecological system that requires attention to individual as well as to community and social dimensions.[3]

Behaviours and practices are context specific – they may be a social norm in one context, but not in another. Social norms can promote or hinder child well-being and attainment of child rights.

---

3   This definition is based on the writings of Cristina Bicchieri, especially *The Grammar of Society: the Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*, New York: Cambridge University Press (2006).

2. Undertaking Qualitative Research

Being able to measure and understand key equity issues (such as gender disparities, discrimination, power relations, etc.) necessitates research tools that engage voices, including at the most marginalized levels, within excluded groups and populations. It is also important to get the views of those considered less or not socially excluded to gauge their perceptions/views which is helpful for informing programme design. The qualitative tools and methods described in this document intend to do just this; they outline to UNICEF staff and programme partners how to engage meaningfully and ethically with both opinion leaders and traditionally excluded members in a given locale and to collect data that provides an in-depth understanding of equity-related issues and how they are manifest on the ground, including their implications for UNICEF-supported programme.

2.1 Identifying the 'sample population'

The method for identifying potential participants (or the 'sample population') depends on a number of factors including; (1) the tool, (2) the purpose of the research, and (3) ethics (including the principle of 'informed consent'). Oftentimes participants are identified because they share some general characteristics (e.g., gender, mothers of children under age 6 months, adolescent girls who are out of school or women who married when they were below age 14). In other instances, the characteristics may be more broad. For example, they may be selected because of their marital status (for which Key Informant Interviews with married women may be appropriate) or simply because

they are residents of a certain community (e.g., Focus Group Discussions with seven rural farmers). As equity focused monitoring seeks to ensure the 'voices' and 'perspectives' of the most excluded are included, it is therefore critical to ensure that those who are most marginalized[4] be considered in the sampling processes.

Under these circumstances, populations are often chosen thoughtfully: researchers identify the participants they wish to learn more about and from based on a set of criteria they determine to be the most essential and helpful for gaining a deeper understanding of a certain phenomenon. This raises the important point of ethics and the principle of 'informed consent'. Informed consent is received after research subjects have been educated about the research project and agree to participate freely, without coersion, after gaining a clear understanding of what their participation involves. Adherence to ethical standards must guide the design and implementation all forms of research, and may raise even greater challenges and considerations to researchers when engaging with populations and groups that are marginalised or excluded.

2.2 Ethics

Ethical concerns must be at the forefront of the design and implementation phase of any monitoring and research exercise, and researchers are responsible for taking all steps to ensure this is prioritized throughout the process including after the research has been completed. Ethical considerations are wide-ranging and include the following: choice of research

---

4   This could be on the basis of individual and/or group characteristics including geographical location, socio-economic status, gender, age, ability/disability, sexual orientation, minority status, etc.

sites; informed consent; respect for confidentiality and privacy of the person(s) being researched; handling sensitive information; being cognizant of and mitigating power imbalances between the researcher and those being researched; security and anonymity of data; access, and; reciprocity. In many countries, there are Research Ethics Committees or Boards to which any research will need to be referred but, in any case, it is important to integrate ethical concerns into the research process.

While ethical considerations are paramount in all research, specific considerations are required when involving children and vulnerable populations or groups (such as adult refugees, internal displaced people, women victims of violence, members of an ethnic minority, children living outside of family care, in institutions or on the street, etc.) to help ensure they are not exposed to any harm and that their rights to privacy and protection are preserved. Engaging with children can present a number of dilemmas for researchers. First, getting access to children may necessitate having informed consent from parents or adult caregivers. Yet, just because an adult provides permission for a child to participate does not necessarily mean that the girl or boy has provided their informed consent, though they may feel obliged to participate given the power differentials between adults and children and feelings of social obligation or flattery at having been 'chosen' for an interview[5]. Such considerations draw attention to the need for researchers to be particularly aware of ethical dilemmas when doing research with very vulnerable populations, both child and adult, and to have the requisite professional skills and experience to carry out ethically responsible research.

Checklist of key ethical considerations in research involving children[6]

- Ensure that all participants give informed consent to their involvement
- Ensure they know they can withdraw their consent at any point
- Be prepared to deal with any distress children may express during the research process
- Make arrangements for further ongoing support to individual children who need it
- Consider child protection issues in daily practice and in the recruitment of research staff
- Seek consent from parents and carers
- Seek the support of community organisations, people who are important in the lives of children locally
- Ensure that information about the research is presented in such a way that it is understandable and attractive to children, and includes information about their rights as respondents and how the data they provide will be handled
- Make practical arrangements to protect the confidentiality of respondents
- Discuss how you would handle situations where risk of serious harm to respon¬dents, both physical and psychological, is disclosed
- Make sure that your methods maximise the chances of girls and boys to par¬ticipate fully

---

5   (Hershfield et al. 1993) NEED FULL CITATION
6   Laws and Mann, So You Want to Involve Children in Research? A Toolkit Supporting Children's Meaningful and Ethical Participation in Research Relating to Violence Against Children: Stockholm: Save the Children (2004). http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/so-you-want-involve-children-research-toolkit-supporting-childrens-meaningful-and-ethical

- Consider how to include the voices of children who face discrimination
- Consider whether there is a need to offer recompense to those helping you with your research and what form this should best take
- Assess possible risks to the safety of research staff and take steps to prevent these
- Ensure that you properly consult with communities in planning your research and contribute where possible to capacity building
- Give feedback to respondents' communities on the findings of the research in an appropriate form

For more details and guidelines on research ethics, including with marginalized and disadvantaged populations, please see the following:

- Ennew and Plateau, *How to Research the Physical and Emotional Punishment of Children*, International Save the Children Alliance Southeast, East Asia and Pacific Region (2004). http://vac.wvasiapacific.org/downloads/saveres.pdf
- Laws and Mann, *So You Want to Involve Children in Research? A Toolkit Supporting Children's Meaningful and Ethical Participation in Research Relating to Violence Against Children*: Stockholm: Save the Children (2004). http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/so-you-want-involve-children-research-toolkit-supporting-childrens-meaningful-and-ethical
- Boyden and Ennew, eds., *Children in Focus: A Manual for Participatory Research with Children*, Stockholm: Save the Children Sweden (1997). http://www.gyerekesely.hu/childpoverty/docs/Children_in_focus_a_manual.pdf
- Ethical Principles, *Dilemmas and Risks in Collecting Data on Violence Against Children: A Review of Available Literature*, New York: UNICEF. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Childprotection_EPDRCLitReview_final_lowres.pdf

2.3 Children's participation in qualitative research

In addition to ethical considerations in carrying out qualitative research, one may consider involving children as researchers. Children's right to express their views freely in all matters that affect them is a right and guiding principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention affirms this principle through the recognition of children's right to seek and receive appropriate information; freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and the right to form and join associations.

Participation of children in research can contribute to producing better quality data, as it can help to clarify its analysis and interpretation. In addition, conducting research with children can contribute new insights into the daily lives of children. Children can be involved in the research process through consultation to verify information, or they can contribute with the collection of information in their communities as well as through peer networks. Child-led rights based research on the other hand is a process in which groups of children identify their research needs, set the research framework, design the methodology, develop and administer the tools and consolidate and analyse the findings. In child-led research, children have ownership of the research and they can use the findings to advocate for their rights. [7]

When involving children in research and/or monitoring it is important to make sure that the process is meaningful to the children involved. This

---

7   Find more information on child led research here: www.concernedforworkingchildren.org/empowering-children/information-management/

has implications for planning, timing, budgeting, choice of methods, analysis, writing, ownership, dissemination, and follow-up. It is important to note that when children are engaged in research they need to be fully informed about the purpose of the research and what implications it is expected to have—for programmes, policies, or their immediate surroundings. This will make it easier for children to choose whether they want to participate in the research process or not.

When conducting research with children, it is important to identify an approach that is also sensitive to the structural and cultural contexts in which children live. It may be necessary to prepare child-friendly materials and games, and other group activities may take up a larger proportion of the research methodology. Researchers should be sensitive to age and gender dynamics, including if/how girls and boys respond differently to various methods and approaches. It is also important to respect children's time and availability to participate (such as their involvement in school, paid work and household responsibilities).

The qualitative research methods presented in the next section are relevant and useful methods to use with children. However, just as any research involves considerations of ethics in the design of the research and implementation, this also applies when facilitating child-led research.

3.   Qualitative Research Methods

As highlighted at the outset, this document highlights a number of methods that may be applicable in qualitative research for equity-focused monitoring. A brief overview is provided of the following methods: Media Review, Participant and Structured Observation, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussion, Social Mapping, Transect Walks, Outcome Mapping, Card Sorting, Pocket Voting, Ethnographic Action Research, Case Study, Most Significant Change, and Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal.

3.1 Media Review

General Description
A media review is the process of studying newspaper articles, letters to the editor, television or radio broadcasts, possibly advertisements, and other types of media as applicable in order to understand the range of opinions around a specific issue of concern. Examples of issues where this method could be used are: FGM/C, child labour, breastfeeding, and HIV/AIDS. The goal of the review process is to determine if there are different views on a particular subject, what they are and which group or groups are promoting which views. If there are different views, it is important to ascertain and assess, at the field level, how they are influencing the attitudes, beliefs and social norms of programme participants, and/or how they are contributing to the development of social norms, attitudes, beliefs, etc. at the national or sub-national levels.

A media review is recommended as a way to assess the overall normative environment, including legal and policy environment, of a programme. If the programme involves behaviours or changes that are considered controversial, the controversy should be analysed through this method in combination with others, such as Key Informant Interviews. The positions of influential organisations, religious groups, or voluntary associations should also be understood. The degree to which one or another position influences programme participants

BANGLADESH, 2014
(Second from right) Ranjit Chakma, Chairman, speaks at a Para Center Management Committee (PCMC) meeting at Golachhari village in Rangamati on 2 February, 2014.
© UNICEF/BANA2014-00581/JANNATUL MAWA

can be assessed through group discussions in pro-gramme field sites.

The insight gained from a Media Review can lead to the refinement of existing, or development of new, messages or communication channels to overcome normative barriers to the types of social change that the programme is trying to promote.

While an extensive media review can provide insight into the views of opinion leaders and community-level decisions makers, it is important to note that the voices of the most marginalized communities are not always reflected in media transcripts or engaged by media outlets and national level media discourses. In order to reach these populations and voices, other participatory, community-based methods are needed such Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) or Key Informant Interviews. This draws attention to the importance of being aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each method and to consider employing a mix of methods to have a more comprehensive understanding of a particular situation.

Further Resources/Guides: Media Review

www.redandi/analise-de-midia.org

3.2 Participant and Structured Observation

General Description

Participant Observation is a method used by ethnographic researchers while present in a community or organisational setting to gain a close understanding of people's lives, including actions, interactions, behaviours and practices, through intensive involvement and often over an extended period of time. It requires extensive field notes and a flexible research design. Examples include observation of hand washing practices among child and adult members of a community, observing the interactions between a mother and her baby in her home, observing a clinic session in a local health facility, or observing a community meeting where programme-related issues are discussed.

CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE, 2011
A group of men draw a map of their community in the village of Kinsiesi, Bas-Congo province, Democratic Republic of Congo. As part of the UNICEF-sponsored program Healthy Village, community members draw a map of their village to identify possible sources of contamination.
© UNICEF/DRCA2011-00042/OLIVIER ASSELIN

Observation is used to document programme processes and typically involves the use of checklist questions as guides and diary type notes to document observed activities as they occur. Both structured observation, simply observing a specific behaviour or event and taking notes without the use of interview, and participant observation, becoming a participant within a group you wish study and using both observation and interviews as a basis for note taking, techniques may be used. If notes are not made at the time, they should be written as soon as possible after the observation or interview. In either case, the interviewer/observer must be prepared with a checklist of the types of people, activities, or events that he/she wants to observe. With permission, the researcher can also engage the community in drawing maps and illustrations, taking photos or videos of situations, activities, and typical behaviours.

Further Resources/Guides: Participant Observation

http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualmeth.php

http://www.findingavoice.org/files/FAVThemes&Discussions.pdf (Tacchi and Kiran)

3.3 Key Informant Interview (KII)

General Description
A Key Informant Interview (KII) involves gathering information directly from an individual who has extensive knowledge or experience on a subject of interest to the researcher/interviewer. With a simple question or topic guide, the interviewer can elicit information from such an individual. Examples include a teacher, midwife, religious leader, or community health worker. KII is useful and effective when the person doing the interview is trusted by the key informant. This allows the interviewer to probe or ask further questions until he or she gets the necessary information.[8]

Interviewer's (& Interpreter's) Responsibilities and Required Skills
The interviewer doing a KII must understand the subject under discussion and have enough background information to guide the interview. In some types of KII, such as speaking with religious or political leaders or specialists in women's health, the interviewer (and interpreter, if any) must be of a gender, age, and/or social status that will help the interviewee feel comfortable speaking freely. In general, the Key Informant should feel that the interviewer is able to understand what he/she is saying, and that it is socially appropriate to have this type of discussion with that type of person. For example, women (including trained midwives or nurses) tend not to speak freely about sexual or reproductive matters in the presence of men.

Tact and discretion are essential to developing and maintaining trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. Although guided by some general questions, it is helpful if the interviewer is sufficiently prepared to ask additional questions in order to explore unexpected, but related, topics that may arise during the discussion. It is important to emphasize that in interviews the key actor is the interviewee not the interviewer. Listening and probing is essential.

As with all personal interviews, appropriate language skills are needed. If the principal interviewer does not know the language, a suitable Interpreter should be engaged. Suitability may include social characteristics, such as gender or age, as well as language skills. The interpreter usually needs special instructions and some practice together with the interviewer. The key instruction is to repeat clearly and completely what the interviewee says, with minimal omissions and absolutely no editorial comments.

Note-taking skills are very important. The interviewer takes the notes, not the interpreter.

Preparing the Checklist/Question Guide
The interviewer will be prepared with some background information about the subject of discussion. If there are dates or other facts, these may be verified during the interview. A set of simple questions, moving from general to specific, must be developed in advance and be at hand. A journalistic formula can help to establish basic facts in some types of interviews: What happened, where, and when; who did it, and with whom?

Sensitive or negative issues should be raised only after the discussion has gone on for some time, there is rapport established between the interviewee and the interviewer and the interviewee is comfortable in the situation.

Ethical Issues
As with all research, the interviewee should be informed of the affiliation of the interviewer and the general purpose of the discussion. The interviewee must be reassured that his/her comments will not be used against him/her if honest responses to queries are to be expected. If the interviewee wishes to speak confidentially, this wish should be respected, although most key informants are public persons known to have specialized types of knowledge or understanding making confidentiality difficult.

---

8   *Behaviour Change Communication in Emergencies: A Toolkit*, Kathmandu, Nepal: UNICEF ROSA. In Part 3: Tools, p. 197.

Logistics: How to Organize and Conduct

Some kind of advance appointment may be needed for a KII. The location should be comfortable for the person being interviewed. The interviewer should let him/her choose if there is more than one possible location. Privacy may or may not be required, depending on the subject of discussion. The interviewer must come on time, as a gesture of respect for the interviewee. It may be necessary to wait for him/her, but it is disrespectful and poor practice if the interviewee has to wait for the interviewer. The seating arrangement should be organized in a way that puts the Key Informant at ease. For example, the interviewer should sit at the same level as the interviewee. A KII typically requires between one and two hours, depending on the subject. The interviewee should be encouraged to speak at length and give what they consider essential background information, to make sure that the discussion deepens understanding of the subject. Notes must be as complete as possible and include information on physical surroundings, gestures, non-verbal expressions, insofar as these supplement the verbal material. With the consent of the interviewee, a KII may be tape-recorded; but even if it is, written notes can save a lot of time and help the interviewer to review the discussion afterwards. Direct quotes usually provide useful insights into the thinking or experience of the interviewee. Notes may include some of the interviewer's lingering questions or matters to be followed up on in some way.

Validity and Verification

It is important to ascertain whether the facts as reported in one KII are accurate or not: some cross-checking with documents or other KIIs may be needed. It is advisable, for example, to speak with three or four different people involved in a situation or an organisation about crucial issues, rather than relying on only one person's point of view.

Otherwise, the Key Informant's own experience and perceptions are the information being sought. In these cases, the interviewer must document this as carefully as possible in written notes. It is not necessary to agree with the Key Informant, but it is necessary to report accurately what he/she says or does.

BANGLADESH, 2013
(Left) Afroza Begum, Community Hygiene Promoter facilitates a community discussion about hygiene and sanitation by using a hand-drawn map of the village of Dharmogram Sharok Para Community, Pabna Sador, Pabna, Bangladesh.
© UNICEF/BANA2013-00171/HABIBUL HAQUE

Analysis of Information

The purpose of a KII is to gain valuable background information on the subject at hand. Examples include, how or why some group organises a movement on behalf of women's rights; why children of a certain group do not attend primary school regularly; or what practices before or during birth are leading to high rates of maternal mortality. Analysis of a KII, therefore, consists in extracting important learning points, discussion themes, and thoughts and relating them to improving the programme.

Uses to Inform Programme Strategy

A few KIIs around a subject can help to build understanding and insights needed to design or modify programmes. A Key Informant is likely to be someone with influence in the population with whom the programme is concerned or a programme participant herself/himself; information about his/her views has value and meaning. A KII with an organisation head or other leader, for example, can provide insight into social norms, local practices, and the ways that they are governed by specific interest groups.

Further Resources/Guides: Key Informant Interviewing

Mack, Natasha, et al. 2005. Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International, Module 3.

3.4 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

General Description

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is an effective way to capture information about social norms, behaviours, and the variety of opinions or views within a particular population (e.g., adult married women, female teachers, and male farmers). The richness of focus group data emerges from the group dynamic and from the diversity of the group. FGDs may help identify commonly held views among group members, including – at times – divergent views. An FGD usually gathers 8 to 15 individuals (not too many) who represent a specific group to talk about a specific subject. The composition of the group is important: depending on the socio-cultural setting, it may be inappropriate to host mixed groups (e.g., adolescent girls and boys). Further, age and gender are important considerations. For example, unmarried adolescent girls may feel uncomfortable expressing their views on a particular topic in the company of older married women, and older women may find it rude if younger children 'capture' the discussion. Discussion is guided by checklist questions (approximately five or six general questions) on different aspects of a subject. The facilitator is supported by a note taker. The facilitator initiates discussion and encourages each participant to share his/her ideas or opinions about each question. Immediately after the FGD – or as soon as possible afterwards – the facilitator and the note taker arrange a debriefing session to discuss the main themes and other points that came up during the FGD.

FGD data consist of written notes, audio – or video – tape recordings, transcripts of those recordings, and notes from the debriefing session. Notes may originally be handwritten in notebooks, on the FGD guide, or on special forms. After data collection, all handwritten notes are expanded into more complete narratives.

INDIA, 2012
Members of Youth Information Center participate during an interview at the center in Bilpudi, Valsad, Gujrat, India.
© UNICEF/INDA2012-00116/PRASHANTH VISHWANATHAN

Facilitator's and Note Taker's Responsibilities and Required Skills

The facilitator is responsible for moving the discussion along and for keeping it 'on topic'. A good facilitator should be skilled at creating a discussion in which he or she participates very little. The facilitator should stress the value of participants' comments and emphasize that the facilitator's own role is that of a learner, rather than a teacher.

The facilitator makes sure that all participants speak and that no one individual dominates the conversation. He/she needs to be able to direct the discussion and maintain a pace that allows all questions in the checklist to be addressed thoroughly. This requires familiarity with the checklist questions, flexibility (changing the order in which questions are asked if necessary, or adding probing questions), and an ability to make quick judgments about how and when to speak. Depending on what participants say, the facilitator may probe to get further information or ideas from a participant.

The role of the note taker is just as important as that of the facilitator. His/her efforts are essential in providing a record that can be used for immediate review of information obtained and improvement of the checklist questions. Note taking skills include mastery of an efficient system for taking copious notes and being able to quickly identify and take down individual quotes that capture the spirit of a given point. Effective note takers should also be careful observers of verbal and nonverbal behaviors (including body language) and discreet about notetaking and use of any recording equipment. The note taker should be able to sum up his or her observations, which will serve as the basis for immediate discussion following each focus group session. The note taker should also include a seating diagram and note carefully who makes each statement, identifying participants by key facts such as gender, age, occupation, age of child, or others.

For the facilitator, proficiency in conducting FGDs is dependent upon adequate preparation, a note taker skilled with effective notetaking techniques, and a holding a productive debriefing session. It is important to remind the note taker that it is critical to record what people say in their own words without edits.

Preparing the Checklist Question Guide

While a good FGD requires limited guidance by the facilitator, being able to design a quality question guide is central to any interview process. Facilitators who do not have special training or extensive experience in FGD should afford special attention to the design of the question guide and not hesitate to seek assistance or pretest their guide.

Guides should: (1) include questions that flow logically and cover interrelated topics, (2) avoid leading questions, and (3) include both follow-up and probing questions. Sensitive or negative issues should be raised only after the discussion has gone on for some time and the participants are feeling comfortable in the situation.

Ethical Issues

Informed consent may be obtained in writing or verbally. Confidentiality must be assured; tell people that their names will not appear in the official report on the discussion. Some FGD participants are paid an honorarium and helped with transport costs. Others are not depending on the policy of a specific programme or project. It is often desirable to provide light refreshments (fruits or snacks) to participants, even if they are not paid for their time. As with any research, participants need to be informed that they may withdraw from the FDG at any time without penalty.

Logistics: How to Organize and Conduct

Preparation: Participants should be invited in advance to ensure that they are available for the duration of the FGD. Depending on the situation, a few days, a day, or a half-day's advance notice may be required. The method of selecting participants depends on the purpose of the discussion. Often, FGD participants share some general characteristic: for example, mothers of children under age 6 months; adolescent boys who are out of school; or women who married when they were below age 14. For equity-focused monitoring it is recommended to engage with people of marginalised or socially excluded groups. Depending on the topic of dis-

cussion, separate groups may need to be formed according to gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. It is important to note that mixing people of different hierarchical status groups (e.g., by socio-economic status or age, for example) will likely discourage 'lower' status or younger people from speaking up during an FGD.

Location:
If any group, particularly those of 'low' socio-economic status, is interviewed on sensitive topics privacy may be needed. The facilitator must be sensitive to any possible social risks so that people will be free to speak openly in the FGD.

Time:
The FGD should be held at a convenient time for participants (e.g., not during meal preparation if housewives are expected to participate). FGDs should not exceed 1 ½ hours.

Uses to Inform Programme Strategy

FGD information is an excellent way to get a picture of group consensus and/or points of disagreement within a short period of time. New information can come up during the FGD process; if it is passed on to senior managers, it can be used to refine programmes and overcome barriers and bottlenecks. For example, by conducting FGDs with men and women separately, and then bringing them together in a culminating focus group, researchers can better understand gender differences and similarities in a given community. Further, by conducting FGDs with separate groups of boys and girls, it may be possible to get perspectives on gender and age as generation-related considerations are also important for informing programming. By starting a dialogue within the community, the research tool itself may help to close gender and age-related differences and serve as an empowering, change-driven strategy during a project's formative phase.

Further Resources/Guides: FGD

Mack et al., 2005. Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International, Module 4. (find hyperlinks)

3.5 Social Mapping

General Description

Social Mapping is a cartographic, two-dimensional, visual representation of the distribution of resources, services, processes, social relationships, and networks. Mapping may help to assess not only where key resources and places are located, but why certain services are or are not being accessed by all members of the community (e.g., why certain health clinics might not be visited by women or children). It can also be used to understand the organisation of institutions. A variant of Social Mapping, Body Mapping, can reveal people's anatomical ideas and health concepts, aspects related to mental and physical health, wellbeing, and even child protection issues such as sexual abuse. By moving away from interview techniques that are strictly guided by predetermined questionnaires or closed-ended questions, mapping and follow-up interviews can reveal cultural barriers, the beliefs that hold them in place, and bottlenecks that may have never arisen from traditional surveys or interviews.

Social Mapping is a useful Participatory Rural/Urban Appraisal (PRA) strategy for learning key background facts about a place or institution in a short period of time. It is suitable, therefore, for the formative research stage of programme development. It may also be used to provide background information when programme monitors enter a new area to do rapid assessments of progress on key indicators.

Normally, mapping is done in a group setting, but may also be done by key informants. The people themselves usually draw the map or diagram in their own way: on paper, or sometimes with sticks on bare earth. The map then serves as a basis for discussion about the topic (e.g., sanitation or water resources, health services, physical safety and areas where girls or boys feel 'safe' and 'unsafe' to venture).

Interviewer/Observer's Required Skills

The person conducting Social Mapping should be skilled at facilitating discussion and encouraging people to share information on the place

where they live, their body concepts, and so on. He/she should encourage participants to do mapping in their own way and not try to correct or 'standardise' their diagram, at least not during the mapping process. Health educators may provide formal instruction after using the Body Mapping tool, which is a respectful way to learn what people do or do not know about bodily structure and functioning.

Discussion Questions

Once the map is complete, the interviewer may ask some general questions. An example of a follow-up question could be, 'Why are there no water points in that part of the village'? Another might be, 'Can children of that place cross the river to get the school during the rainy season'?

Ethical Issues

The topics of discussion are usually public knowledge, so privacy concerns are not likely to come up

in mapping. It is highly recommended, however, that the interviewer politely introduce him/herself to the group and give a brief explanation of why the mapping information is requested.

Logistics: How to Organize and Conduct

Social Mapping tends to be rather informally organized. In a rural community especially, there are people around who know the location well, though there may be fewer people during some seasons than others. In an urban location, however, where people may be busy with paid work, a time of day should be chosen when there will be responsible adults around willing to provide the needed mapping information. In more formal situations, such as creating organisational diagrams, an appointment usually will be required.

Body Mapping consists of one or more persons of the same cultural background drawing a picture of a body and its main parts to show how they under-

CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE, 2011
A group of men draw a map of their community in the village of Kinsiesi, Bas-Congo province, Democratic Republic of Congo. As part of the UNICEF-sponsored program Healthy Village, community members draw a map of their village to identify possible sources of contamination.
© UNICEF/DRCA2011-00039/OLIVIER ASSELIN

stand physiological processes and/or where and how health problems arise.

Normally one or two people in the group, if there is a group, will have more expertise than others and may contribute more than others to the discussion. Unlike FGDs, when no one should dominate the discussion, this may be more acceptable in mapping exercises.

A Mapping session usually takes about an hour depending on what is being requested.

Uses to Inform Programme Strategy

Social Maps may be stored to use as case study or baseline study materials; they may also disappear after the discussion is concluded if they are drawn on the bare earth. The interviewer may or may not wish to photograph a temporary map.

The information provided by Social Mapping will concern the spatial distribution of programme impacts or programme-provided resources within localities covered by a programme whereas Body Mapping provides information on body knowledge which can be useful to inform project design.

Further Resources/Guides: Social Mapping and Body Mapping

Chambers, R. Rural appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory, IDS Discussion Paper 311.

http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/idspublication/rural-appraisal-rapid-relaxed-and-participatory

http://www.aidsalliance.org/includes/Publication/Tools_Together_Now_2009.pdf

http://intranet.unicef.org/PD/CBSC.nsf/0/59ED2C557222607E852576BF0053C246/$FILE/BCC%20Toolkit_Final-ROSA18April06.pdf

Cornwall, Andrea, 2001. Body Mapping in Health PRA/RRA. London: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). Originally published in RRA Notes (1992), Issue 16, pp.69–76.

3.6 Transect Walk

General Description

The Transect Walk is a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tool for observing the terrain and everyday life in a given place from the perspective of local community members. During the walk, stops are made along the way, and observations are discussed with community members. After the walk is over, a small group discussion may ensue.

Use in Equity-focused Monitoring

Transect walks can help provide an overview of the distribution of resources, use of a particular service or supply, or other specific features of a settlement in a short period of time. For example, a transect walk may be used to check for treated bed-nets in every other house and asking persons in that house who sleeps under them.

Interviewer/Observer's Responsibilities and Required Skills

Little specific training is required. A camera can be useful and it is important to take notes on all observations. The observer may wish to draw a diagram of the route taken and any observations made.

Katrina, a volunteer for the national NGO DAPP (Development Aid from People to People), makes a 'family visit' in in the village of Olukuma, Namibia.
© UNICEF/NYHQ2008-0806/John Isaac

Logistics: How to Organize and Conduct

Little preparation is required other than (a) preparing a simple list of observations to be made and questions to be asked at each stop, (b) finding a local person to accompany one on the path, and (c) deciding on the route. The route is usually followed to its end making regular stops along the way. Time required: One hour or less, depending on the length of the walk and the subject of study.

Analysis of Information

Observations and queries may lead to further questions needing more in-depth investigation.

Further Resources/Guides: Transect Walks

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/
EXTTOPPSISOU/Resources/1424002-
1185304794278/4026035-
1185375653056/4028835-1185375678936/1_
Transect_walk.pdf

Integrated Approaches to Participatory Development (IAPAD) website focuses on sharing information on participatory mapping methodologies and processes: www.iapad.org.

Transect mapping: http://www.iapad.org/
transect_mapping.htm

3.7   Outcome Mapping

General Description

Outcome Mapping is an assessment method which analyses the progress or results of a programme in its organisational and social context. Outcome Mapping can be adapted for use at the project, programme, or organisational levels as a monitoring system or it can be used to evaluate ongoing or completed activities. It takes a learning-based and user-driven view of evaluation guided by principles of participation and iterative learning, encouraging evaluative thinking throughout the programme cycle by all team members. This approach significantly alters the way a programme's goals are understood and how its performance and results are assessed. The contribution of multiple groups and their relationships to progress or outcomes is assessed in a workshop context.

Outcome Mapping establishes a vision of the human, social, and environmental betterment to which the programme hopes to contribute and then focuses monitoring and evaluation on factors and actors within its sphere of influence. The programme's contributions to development are planned and assessed based on its influence on the partners with whom it is working to effect change. At its essence, development is accomplished through changes in the behaviour of people; therefore, this is the central concept of Outcome Mapping.

With Outcome Mapping, programmes identify the partners with whom they will work and then devise strategies to help equip their partners with the tools, techniques, and resources to contribute to the development process. Focusing monitoring and evaluation on changes in partners, as well as individuals, also illustrates that although a programme can influence the achievement of outcomes it cannot control them. Ultimate responsibility for change rests with its boundary partners, along with their partners and other actors.

Outcome Mapping was developed by the International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) Evaluation Unit. [9]

---

9   For further resources on Outcome Mapping see:
     Outcome Mapping Learning Community: http://outcomemapping.ca/;
     Knowledge Sharing Toolkit: http://www.kstoolkit.org/Outcome+Mapping;
     S. Earl, F. Carden, T. Smutylo, Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflecting into Development Programs, Ottawa:
     IDRC (2001). http://www.outcomemapping.ca/download.php?file=/resource/files/OM_English_final.pdf

Outcome Mapping Workshop Process

Terminology

▪ Boundary Partners: Those individuals, groups, and organisations with whom the programme interacts directly to effect change and with whom the programme can anticipate some opportunities for influence.

▪ Outcomes: Changes in relationships, activities, actions, or behaviours of boundary partners that can be logically linked to a programme's activities either directly or indireclty. These changes are aimed at contributing to specific aspects of human and ecological well-being by providing the boundary partners with new tools, techniques, and resources to contribute to the development process.

▪ Progress Markers: A set of graduated indicators of changed behaviours of a boundary partner that focus on depth or quality of change.

▪ The full Outcome Mapping process includes three stages. For each stage, tools and worksheets are provided to assist programmes to organize and collect information on their contributions to desired outcomes.

  ◆ First Stage, Intentional Design: The programme identifies its strategic directions, goals, partners, activities, and progress markers toward anticipated results.

  ◆ Second Stage, Outcome and Performance Monitoring: The programme develops a framework for ongoing monitoring of the programme's actions in support of its boundary partners' progress towards the achievement of outcomes using 'progress markers'. Workshop participants reflect on their experience in three types of journals:
      - Outcome Journal
      - Strategy Journal
      - Performance Journal

  ◆ Third stage, Evaluation Planning: Helps the programme to set evaluation/monitoring priorities

Use in Equity-focused Monitoring
Outcome Mapping can be used in programme monitoring or evaluation to analyse the ways that the organisational environment may be a bottleneck. It may be done by UNICEF together with development partners in a workshop setting.

Interviewer/Observer's Responsibilities and Required Skills
The services of a skilled workshop facilitator knowledgeable about Outcome Mapping are required.

Analysis of Information and Use to Inform Programme Strategy
In cases where the organisational environment is a bottleneck, the workshop process could offer a forum in which to negotiate and resolve difficulties among boundary partners.

Further Resources/Guides: Outcome Mapping

Earl, Sarah, et al., Outcome Mapping; Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre (2001).
http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

3.8 Card Sorting

General Description
Card sorting is a way to facilitate discussion by having participants organise and compare cards with names or graphic representations as a way to get their views on a specific topic. Cards with words, graphics, or pictures are arranged or ranked according to specific criteria. It has been used as a way to analyse relationships between partner organisations and for educational purposes. For example, the person leading and facilitating this tool could request a few donor representatives use such cards to describe and compare the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) they are funding. At programme field sites, card sorting may help to assess local knowledge levels, priorities, and values.

Use in Equity-focused Monitoring

This tool could be used to make an initial assessment of UNICEF's relationships with partner organisations or it could be used in meetings with programme staff to learn about how and why programmes differ in their levels of performance, bottlenecks, or in other ways.

Logistics: How to Organize and Conduct

The facilitator of this tool sits with programme staff and makes lists of multiple groups or regions/areas covered by the project (i.e., women's groups, persons belonging to ethnic minorities, etc). Specific names would be written on cards which would serve as the focus of discussion.

Graphic materials should be designed in culturally appropriate ways so that those participating understand what the cards represent. Depending on the topic it may be helpful to involve local artists in the design or adaptation.

Uses to Inform Programme Strategy

Information on different places or organisations may come up through this process that require further analysis or attention through more structured methods such as Outcome Mapping.

Further Resources/Guides: Card Sorting

- Behaviour Change Communication in Emergencies: A Toolkit, Kathmandu, Nepal: UNICEF ROSA. p. 178
- Rick Davies, Hierarchical Card Sorting: A Tool for Qualitative Research, Centre for Development Studies, Swansea, UK. http://www.swan.ac.uk/cds/rd1.htm
- www.mande.co.uk/docs/treemap.htm
- http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/treemap.htm

3.9 Pocket Voting

General Description

A cloth pocket chart is made by a local tailor, or a board chart is made by a carpenter. Drawings or pictures of selected socio-cultural practices are put outside each pocket. People are asked to vote in private by placing stones or pieces of

A pocket sheet for storing locally made teaching aids. This can also be used for 'pocket voting'.
© UNICEF/UGDA00170/Taira Kayoko

cardboard in the 'pockets' that best reflect their actual behaviours.

Relevance to Equity-focused Monitoring

Pocket Voting is one way to get information on behaviour patterns during a rapid assessment process.

Logistics

The pockets and other items need to be provided in advance. The materials should remain in place for a few hours so people can 'vote' without having others observe them.

Analysis of Information

Numbers of stones or other markers in each pocket are counted.

Uses to Inform Programme Strategy

This tool gives an estimate of the frequency of certain behaviours which are difficult to observe directly (e.g., defecation habits of women, men, or children could be reported by putting differently coloured pieces of paper – colour-coded for each gender or age group – into pockets with pictures representing open defecation or various types of latrine arrangements).

Further Resources/Guides

- http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0406e/a0406e09.htm#TopOfPage see Part 3, Tools
- http://www.influenzaresources.org/files/BCC_in_Emerg_chap1to8_2006.pdf

3.10. Ethnographic Action Research

General Description

Ethnographic Action Research (EAR)[10] is a method that combines research with programme development. The goal of EAR is to understand a situation – a group, place, or process of change. Once it is built into a programme, EAR becomes an important tool for understanding and further developing project objectives and outcomes at the local level. EAR researchers work to continually develop and deepen their understandings of local contexts. A well trained EAR researcher will share this knowledge with colleagues to develop the programme accordingly. A well trained EAR researcher will ensure that there are high levels of participation by community members and programme staff in both research activities and the programme itself.

The EAR method combines three research approaches: ethnography, participatory techniques and action research. 'Ethnography' is a research approach that has traditionally been used to understand different cultures in detail. It is long term research and requires the researcher to be embedded in local cultures. A good ethnographer is an excellent listener and observer who is able to reflect upon and interpret what s/he hears and observes. Reflexivity is central to understanding and interpreting the findings and analysis. The ethnographer must note his/her own biases and the power balances that exist between him/herself and those being researched.

'Participatory techniques' are used by EAR researchers to draw the people they seek to understand into the process of producing, analysing and using information. Participatory techniques can be immensely valuable to researchers who strive to make use of ethnography not just to understand a culture, but also to effect progressive social change.

'Action research' is a process by which researchers and programme staff review and create new programme activities in response to the findings and new understandings of the 'context' introduced by the ethnographic research and participatory techniques. In other words, ethnographic principles and methods are used along with participatory techniques to guide the study process. Action research is then used to link the findings back to the initiative through the development and planning of new activities.

EAR is used for the following:
- When you want to understand and involve users or target groups, and understand their social, cultural, economic, and political environments;
- When an initiative is flexible and will respond to research findings in order to become more relevant to its users, and;
- When the initiative team will value research as an important and ongoing component of their initiative's development.

EAR is not to be used for the following:
- When all that is required is a 'snapshot' of an initiative without any understanding of the complexity of participants/community members and their environment, and;
- When one is looking for a short, fast evaluation that takes place only at the beginning and/or end of an initiative.

Use in Equity-focused Monitoring

EAR is recommended as a way to do an assessment of programme progress in an over-all social and cultural context, especially in problem situations. It is a complex activity but in difficult situa-

---

10 For Further information on EAR see:
    J. Holdsworth and R. J. Wilson, Doing Ethnographic Research: A Practical Guide, Sage http://www.abe.pl/en/book/9781412947077/doing-ethnographic-research-a-practical-guide
    Kay E. Cook, Using Critical Ethnography to Explore Issues in Health Promotion, Qualitative Health Research Vol 15, no. 1 (2005): 129-138. http://www.brown.uk.com/teaching/qualitativepostgrad/cook.pdf

tions may produce useful insights about multiple types of bottlenecks and barriers to programme progress.

Interviewer/Observer's Responsibilities and Required Skills

Some background in social theory is essential. Language skills greatly enhance the ethnographer's effectiveness, although study of non-verbal communication is also required.

Participant Observation and Key Informant Interviews are some of the tools typically used by ethnographers. A person doing EAR should understand these tools, which are described below.

Preparing the Study Plan

Depending on the issue of concern, key forces should be analysed before the study begins, with the understanding that new information will arise during field study.

Ethical Issues

The people being observed/interviewed must be informed of the overall purposes of the assessment and their informed consent must be provided. Often permission from a locally respected leader will be needed before work can commence. Having permission from a locally respected leader does not, however, preclude informed consent from those being observed and interviewed.

Logistics: How to Organise and Conduct

EAR can be implemented as part of a 'rapid appraisal' strategy either by an individual or by a small group of people with the required skills. If a group conducts EAR, all must coordinate their activities on a daily basis and share insights. Each person has specific types of responsibilities and daily interview/observation goals. The more time they spend at the research site, the better.

Combining interviews with observation is essential. EAR involves as much observation as possible, rather than relying entirely on people's reports about their own habits or activities. For example, when speaking with a woman about how she handles food or drinking water, or when and how she washes her hands, it is most desirable to spend enough time informally to observe her actually performing these activities and discretely note what she does as well as what she says she does.

As with other qualitative research methods, analysis consists of frequent (daily or more) writing and review of field notes. Information checking on site is essential; crucial facts about a situation, for example, should be cross-checked (e.g., by asking multiple people the same question) if this is possible.

Time Required

Ethnography is not a rapid assessment technique, but ethnographic methods can be utilised during rapid appraisals. The time spent on ethnographic methods depends on the object of inquiry and the observer's level of understanding of local people and their language. A simple problem or process can be analysed in a short period of time (one or two days) with careful preparation, such as development of checklists to guide observations or interviews.

Findings should be discussed with local people, engaging them in the review process and follow-up action planning. As a result, this method often requires a week's time or more, depending on the topic. While a programme staff member may conduct a series of key informant interviews or structured observations as part of his/her routine field visits, a formal EAR study requires a time commitment and expertise that programme staff will unlikely be able to meet. Programme staff should see the value in this method, however, and seek consultants or staff to complete the study properly.

Analysis of Information

EAR observations and interviews are reviewed carefully for the insights they can provide into how the overall social and cultural context of the programme is affecting progress toward the desired goal. Key influencers are identified and personal and social factors affecting behaviour change are analysed.

Uses to Inform Programme Strategy

With EAR, the emphasis is on action. This means that information about programme context

– group relationships, social norms – and programme processes must be analysed in ways that will help planners (or the people themselves) decide what steps are needed to improve a programme's chances of success. EAR also helps provide clear insights into power relationships among groups. This information can refine a programme's direction by helping to identify which groups influence change processes and which stakeholders are exerting positive or negative pressures on the target population. EAR, which relies on listening and observation, is a good way to learn about the assumptions people make about the world and their place in it (e.g., cultural beliefs). These beliefs may or may not support a programme's goals. In either case, information about cultural beliefs can be helpful in identifying action steps to refine programme strategy.

**Further Resources/Guides:
Ethnographic Action Research**

- EAR Ethnographic Action Research Training Handbook (http://ear.findingavoice.org/)

3.11. Case Study

General Description
A Case Study involves the collection and organisation of detailed information about a particular situation or person/s, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. Case studies can often be collected during rapid assessments, as people discuss their lives, local history, and so on. Comparing different types of scenarios, people, or situations through the Case Study method can provide insight into **why** a certain outcome may or may not occur under specific types of social conditions, or **how** decisions are made under different types of conditions.

Specific individuals can be interviewed or observed at multiple points in time in order to develop a sense of how a programme is or is not affecting some specific people's lives in the expected way. Facts of case studies (e.g., dates, information on other persons or groups) must be validated by cross-checking if possible. Concerning program-

ming, the subject of the Case Study may be an individual or group whose experience can show something about programme processes or context. The selection of the subject, then, depends on the programme goals and characteristics of the target population.

Use in Equity-focused Monitoring
Case Studies can provide programme staff and planners with an opportunity to learn about unexpected consequences of their interventions or about contextual factors that influence specific people's behaviour. They are particularly suitable to learning about bottlenecks to change and the ways these can be overcome under various types of circumstances.

Preparing for a Case Study Interview
The subjects of Case Studies often appear spontaneously during field visits. If their situation or story seems particularly compelling and relevant for a particular purpose, it may be worthwhile to take some time to collect information while the opportunity exists and if they provide informed consent to participate. Other Case Studies, however, are planned in a more deliberate way. A certain type of person or situation may be explored systematically in multiple case studies.

Ethical Issues
The subject of a Case Study has the right to confidentiality. He or she must be informed about the purpose of collecting the story, be given the option of participating or not without any adverse consequences and reassured that the information will not be used in any way that may reveal that person's identity and/or cause any harm.

Analysis of Information
Case Studies are usually written in a short and readable format. They may represent typical experiences but they usually include a lot of unique detail. The benefit of this detail is that it gives a snapshot of social, cultural, and other processes that are likely influencing programme outcomes, at least under certain conditions.

Comparing different people or situations can give insights into contextual factors and other reasons

why people do or do not follow the programme's recommendations. For example, sanitation practices in a rich vs. a poor household; a person who is unwilling to be tested for HIV vs. a person who is willing, and; a mother who is exclusively breastfeeding vs. one who is giving supplementary foods.

Uses to Inform Programme Strategy

The Case Study is useful to a programme insofar as it brings out unexpected information. The newly discovered processes or contextual factors can be further investigated to determine how widespread they are and refine programme design.

3.12. Most Significant Change (MSC)

General Description

The Most Significant Change (MSC) process involves the collection of significant change stories written or tape recorded by primary stakeholders of a programme or members of a community of interest. Stories are systematically selected by panels of designated stakeholders and discussed in great detail. Focusing on those deemed 'most significant' the panel specifically explores what the selected stories reveal about programme impact.

Use for Equity-focused Monitoring

By providing a platform for participants to share their experiences in their own words and with little guidance, MSC can provide insight into the impact and outcomes of programmes in much more detail than a survey or structured interview. Not only does this tool allow for unexpected programme impact and changes to be documented but it can reveal a fuller picture of how change processes occur; this data can then help inform programme objectives during and after implementation. In other words, MSC stories – like Case Studies or Key Informant Interviews – can provide programme staff and planners with an opportunity to learn about both unexpected changes, and

bottlenecks to change, and the ways that these can be overcome.

MSC is a highly participatory approach to monitoring that is being used more frequently and is recommended in development contexts. In the 2011 "Research, Monitoring and Evaluation in Communication for Development" resource pack,[11] an expert panel listed a number of important strengths of MSC:

> People love telling and hearing stories, if the environment is safe and trust and rapport well established. [MSC] caters to the unexpected and unpredictable. [MSC] enables people to tell their own stories, in their own words, and to have these listened to by an interested outsider in a safe environment. The process can be empowering both for the interviewer and the interviewee. When the MSC technique is followed through, there is great group learning potential – both from the stories themselves as well as from the group's active participation in the process. For example, having to prioritize and select particular stories, and justify the rationale in each case, fuels important discussion, debate and learning. It can be a very satisfying process for all involved. MSC can really capture the rich detail of changes in the lives of people, communities and organisations involved. (Expert panel member, 2011)

MSC should be used in combination with other methodologies and monitoring methods. It involves assessing the changes and impacts that have happened as a result of a programme from the perspective of participants. Programme participants and stakeholders are involved in deciding what sort of change should be recorded and analysing the stories that are collected. The MSC process happens throughout the programme cycle and provides monitoring information that can help staff to improve a programme. It may also contribute to evaluation by providing informa-

---

11   "Research, Monitoring and Evaluation in Communication for Development" Resource Pack http://www.unicef.org/cbsc/files/RME-RP-Evaluating_C4D_Trends_Challenges__Approaches_Final-2011.pdf

tion about the impacts and outcomes of a programme that can be used to assess how well the programme as a whole is working. A key aim is to encourage continuous dialogue up and down the various levels of an organisation, from field level to senior staff and back again. When this process works well, it can be a powerful tool for ongoing monitoring and learning. Although MSC emphasises qualitative monitoring and reporting of change, it can also enable some quantification of changes.

While the MSC technique has proven popular and effective, and has an 'apparent simplicity', its logistical and analytic challenges should not be underestimated. Along with the unavoidable challenges that arise with any study that depends on the careful organisation of groups of people, a thorough MSC study often demands the translation of several different languages, transcription of long stories, and special attention to illiterate participants.

Interviewer/Observer's Responsibilities and Required Skills
Organizing the MSC work is itself considered to be a useful training activity for field staff; it helps them understand some of the unintended consequences (positive or negative) of their programme-related activities.

Ethical Issues
Like the other tools in this guide, participation in MSC is entirely voluntary and based on the principle of informed consent.

Further Resources/Guides: MSC
- http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf
- Davies, R., and J. Dart, The Most Significant Change 'MSC' Technique: A guide to its use. 2005

- Ongevalle, J.V. and A. Maarse, et al., Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of Complex Processes of Social Change (Working Paper), The Netherlands:PSO, June 2011. http://www.pso.nl/files/images/11_Learning history ETC COMPAS 2010.pdf

3.13. Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA)

General Description
Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal was adapted from 'Rapid Rural Appraisal' (RRA) as a way to conduct multidisciplinary and participatory research in rural settings without requiring the intensive time commitment assumed by other qualitative investigations. By actively involving community members in the research process, the method also builds capacity by training people in research and involving them in the analysis. Beyond capacity building, this process 'allows stakeholders to play an active role in defining their realities and priorities'[12].

In addition to engaging a range of participatory and qualitative tools and methods, PRCA includes quantitative 'Knowledge, Attitudes, Behaviour and Practice' (KABP) baseline surveys for 'Situation and Communication Analyses'.

Rapid Rural Appraisal, the model that gave rise to PRCA, emerged in the late 1970s due to dissatisfaction with the "biases … of rural development tourism, … disillusionment with the normal processes of questionnaire surveys and their results … [and] … the growing recognition that rural people were themselves knowledgeable on many subjects which touched their lives"[13]. Chambers outlines ten disparate RRA methods[14] – which include using existing information, key indicators, local researchers, direct observation, key informants, and

---

12   Mefalopulos, Paolo, "Communication for Sustainable Development: Applications and Challenges," in *Media and Glocal Change: Rethinking Communication for Development*, ed. Oscar Hemer and Thomas Tufte (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005), 250.

13   Robert Chambers, "The Origin and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal," *World Development* 22, no. 7 (1994): 956.

14   Chambers, "The Origin and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal," 956.

group interviews – and argues that, "except when rushed and unself-critical, RRA came out better by criteria of cost-effectiveness, validity and reliability when it was compared to more conventional methods" [15]

Logistics: Brief Overview of How to Conduct a PRCA study

Conducting a PRCA study contains several steps beginning with the production of a baseline study plan that results from a preliminary assessment (including the use of secondary data) of the situation and crucial issues of the participating communities. Once community members are trained in the basic research tools that are central to the study (i.e., interviewing, conducting focus groups, questionnaires, etc.) and any relevant tools are pretested (i.e., questionnaires), data collection is conducted in the field. Once the data collection process is over, the information is analysed, discussed, and reflected upon with the community. The result of these analytical discussions are then reported back to the community.

Further Resources/Guides: PRCA
- http://www.fao.org/sd/dim_kn1/docs/y5793e03.pdf

---

15   Robert Chambers, *Revolutions in Development Inquiry* (London: Earthscan, 2008), 74-78.

4. Validity of Qualitative Research

The validity of data can be enhanced through triangulation. Qualitative data, for instance, becomes more useful – and increases in credibility – when coupled with other sources of information, including data collected by quantitative methods, multiple interviews, or data on the same topic collected by more than one interviewer.

Theory can also help guide monitoring and analysis. Analysis of programme-related change should make use of logic models based on a theory of change. These models identify (1) what processes we assume will lead to the changes or outcomes we expect; and (2) what people or institutions can influence these outcomes positively or negatively.

Sustained, positive social and systemic change is at the heart of programming in all sectors. Annual and bi-annual monitoring activities will help identify change processes at national and sub-national levels. Done carefully, equity-focused monitoring should help country offices and development partners to sharpen their focus on social, cultural, political, or other barriers that impede programmes from reaching their desired change goals. Monitoring should thus serve as a learning process that engages multiple stakeholders in different ways and that supports the modification of development strategies while programmes are still underway.

5.   Conclusion

The qualitative monitoring methods and tools highlighted in this document are intended to help us better understand (1) how interventions, including programmes and policies, and other developments are perceived by different groups in a participant community and (2) the various social, behavioural, cultural, and change processes that reside behind and often shape programme performance. As such, these methods and tools seek to support programme staff and partners in three key areas.

First, they help provide a working relationship – between the programme team and the participant community – that is built on a partnership of shared knowledge, visions, and perspectives. In terms of equity, this approach is useful at every phase of the programme cycle. During the formative research phase, these methods and tools may help stakeholders gain a more comprehensive understanding of the resources, needs, rights enjoyed, attitudes, and behaviours of community members and local social norms prior to programme design. Mapping, Transect Walks, and Focus Group Discussions (among other tools described above) are ways the programme team, including partners and local stakeholders, can understand the organisation of institutions and incorporate local people's knowledge in understanding the distribution of resources, services, social relationships, and daily life in a given setting. By incorporating the community in project objectives, through the provision of an avenue for their participation in the formative phase of a project, they may also take an active part in the implementation and monitoring phases.

Secondly, these methods and tools may be used to elicit participant groups' perspectives on the Situation Analysis. Participatory research undertaken at the formative phase of a programme does not mean the replacement of the Situation Analysis. Instead, the qualitative tools outlined in this document are meant to buttress and better inform this analysis and to provide a forum for the community to contribute to understandings of their community and needs.

Finally, these qualitative methods and tools, combined with quantitative research, help programme staff and partners explore social, cultural, and equity issues that may be serving as mediating variables to statistical studies and, most importantly, as barriers to UNICEF-supported programmes. By listening and providing spaces for community members' voices, during interviews and group discussions, these methods and tools can help identify how attitudes, behaviours, and community-level decisions are shaped at the local level. By improving understandings of local processes – which are often overlooked in surveys and other research tools – programme staff and partners can become better positioned to address challenges and problems in projec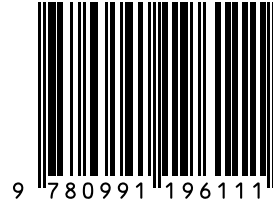t design and implementation and better serve local needs.