

CONDUCTING KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

A.I.D. PROGRAM DESIGN AND EVALUATION METHODOLOGY REPORT NO. 13

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
1.1 <u>Description of Key Informant Interviews</u>	1
1.2 <u>Appropriateness of Key Informant Interviews</u>	1
1.3 <u>Advantages and Limitations of Key Informant Interviews</u>	3
2. <u>PLANNING STUDIES USING KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS</u>	4
2.1 <u>Formulating Study Questions</u>	4
2.2 <u>Reviewing Available Information</u>	5
2.3 <u>Developing a Conceptual Framework</u>	6
2.4 <u>Preparing an Interview Guide</u>	7
2.5 <u>Selecting Key Informants</u>	8
3. <u>CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS</u>	11
3.1 <u>Initial Contact</u>	11
3.2 <u>Sequencing Questions</u>	11
3.3 <u>Wording of Questions</u>	13
3.4 <u>Role Playing</u>	14
3.5 <u>Probing Techniques</u>	15
3.6 <u>Controlling Conversations</u>	16
3.7 <u>Maintaining a Neutral Attitude</u>	18
3.8 <u>Using Translators During Interviews</u>	19
3.9 <u>Recording the Interview</u>	21
3.10 <u>Using Tape Recorders</u>	22
3.11 <u>Translation</u>	23
4. <u>ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA</u>	23
4.1 <u>Interview Summary Sheet</u>	23
4.2 <u>Use of Descriptive Code</u>	25
4.3 <u>Storing and Retrieval System</u>	27
4.4 <u>Presenting Data</u>	27
5. <u>IMPROVING THE RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF FINDINGS</u>	29
5.1 <u>Checking for "Representativeness"</u>	29
5.2 <u>Assessing the Key Informants</u>	30
5.3 <u>Checking Interviewer or Investigator Bias</u>	30
5.4 <u>Checking for Negative Evidence</u>	32
5.5 <u>Getting Feedback from Informants</u>	32

6. CONCLUSION 32

For any Tables, Figure Boxes, or Graphs that may be omitted from this document may be found on Microfiche.

FOREWORD

Experience with data collection and analysis for development projects and programs suggests that many widely used, rigorous data collection methods, particularly large sample surveys, censuses, and detailed ethnographic descriptions, are not always the most appropriate for generating information for project and program planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Such methods require considerable investments of time and resources and tend to generate data that are often too elaborate for their intended purposes. As a result, there has been a growing interest in the use of less rigorous methods that can provide timely information in a cost-effective fashion.

The Center for Development Information and Evaluation has identified five such methods--community/group interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, informal surveys, and rapid direct observation, and has been preparing a series of guidelines, papers, and case studies on each of them. We have already published two monographs on this subject. The first, entitled Rapid, Low-Cost Data Collection Methods for A.I.D., discusses the nature, uses, advantages, and limitations of these methods and provides general guidance for preparing the scopes of work for them. The second, Conducting Group Interviews in Developing Countries, gives extensive practical guidance for conducting community/group interviews and focus group discussions. The present publication, the third in the series, focuses on key informant interviews.

Like the earlier publications, this guide is written for the use of A.I.D. managers, contractors, and host country institutions and officials who are involved in gathering information for decision-making in project and program contexts. I am sure that they will find it both relevant and useful.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although key informant interviews are widely conducted in development settings, the quality and nature of the information they generate remain suspect for a variety of reasons. Key informants are not carefully selected. Interview guides are not prepared in advance. Questions are inaptly worded and clumsily asked. The responses are not properly recorded and systematically analyzed. And above all, the findings are not satisfactorily verified. Thus, too often, this potentially useful and versatile method of data collection becomes a poorly planned activity generating information of dubious value and low credibility.

To improve the quality of information for use in project and program design, implementation, and evaluation, this report outlines the steps involved in gathering and analyzing information through key informant interviews. It also discusses the advantages, limitations, and possible uses of such information.

1.1 Description of Key Informant Interviews

Simply stated, key informant interviews involve interviewing a select group of individuals who are likely to provide needed information, ideas, and insights on a particular subject. Two characteristics of key informant interviews need special mention.

First, only a small number of informants are interviewed. Such informants are selected because they possess information or ideas that can be solicited by the investigator. Depending on the nature and scope of an inquiry, the investigator identifies appropriate groups from which the key informants are drawn and then selects a few individuals from each group. The number of key informants usually ranges from 15 to 35. Such interviews should not, however, be confused with formal and informal surveys in which a relatively large number of people are interviewed.

Second, key informant interviews are essentially qualitative interviews. They are conducted using interview guides that list the topics and issues to be covered during a session. The interviewer frames the actual questions in the course of interviews. The atmosphere in these interviews is informal, resembling a conversation among acquaintances. The interviewer subtly probes informants to elicit more information and takes elaborate notes, which are developed later. If all the relevant items are not covered in a session, the interviewer goes back to the key informant. It is the unstructured nature of the interviews that invests them with special meaning and relevance in the present discussion.

1.2 Appropriateness of Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews are appropriate for generating information and ideas in many situations, particularly the following:

1. When general, descriptive information is sufficient for decision-making. Such information may pertain to existing organizations and institutions, socioeconomic conditions

of an area (e.g., village, community, or city), or the general characteristics of the target populations (e.g., their occupations, religion, values, and beliefs). General, descriptive information is particularly important in project and program planning and later in conducting evaluations.

2. When understanding of the underlying motivations and attitudes of a target population is required. Key informant interviews can help determine not only what people do but why they do it. Such interviews are excellent for documenting people's reasons for their behavior and people's understandings or misunderstanding of issues. For example, well-designed key informant interviews can reveal local attitudes toward family planning, community health, and women's programs, information that is necessary to plan effective interventions in these areas.

On the basis of interviews conducted with a few key informants, an investigator should be able to find answers to the following kinds of questions: Why are farmers not repaying loans obtained from the village cooperatives? Why are local entrepreneurs not showing interest in the technical assistance provided under the microenterprise project? Why are local grocers not enthusiastic about selling the subsidized contraceptives? Why is the national bureaucracy reluctant to introduce policy changes despite pressure from international donor agencies? In all these cases, key informant interviews can provide information and insights for making critical decisions.

3. When quantitative data collected through other methods need to be interpreted. Usually, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Missions, host governments, and project and program managers have access to routinely generated data on, for example, financial outlays, targets reached, volume of inputs and services provided to the target populations, and beneficiaries contacted. They also have access to data gathered for other purposes by other donor agencies, research organizations, and government agencies. Key informant interviews can be extremely useful in interpreting such data for specific inquiries. For example, a survey conducted by a local university showed that female farmers are not using the technical package recommended by the project. Interviews with selected key informants can shed light on the factors that explain this behavior.

4. When the primary purpose of the study is to generate suggestions and recommendations. In many cases, the prime reason for an investigation is to help solve a problem faced by a project or program manager, so what is needed is a set of practical recommendations. For example, the manager of a contraceptive social marketing project may be concerned with finding out what can be done to increase contraceptive sales. The manager's needs can be better served through interviews to elicit the suggestions of doctors, pharmacists, medical workers, traders, and current and potential users than by an in-depth, quantitative study of the subject.

5. When preliminary studies are needed for the design of a comprehensive quantitative study. In preparation for survey questionnaires, key informant interviews can

help define the parameters of the study. The scope of data collection, the choice of questions, and the structure of questionnaires can be developed on the basis of these interviews. For example, when a baseline study is being planned prior to the implementation of a nutrition program, informants can suggest questions about current eating habits, types of foods consumed, or food taboos and can provide insights that may be helpful in phrasing queries.

1.3 Advantages and Limitations of Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews have advantages and limitations. The main advantages are the following:

1. Because information comes directly from knowledgeable people, key informant interviews often provide data and insight that cannot be obtained with other methods. Key informants may offer confidential information that would not be revealed in other settings. They may tell of incidents, local happenings, or conditions that explain implementation problems.

2. Key informant interviews provide flexibility to explore new ideas and issues that had not been anticipated in planning the study but that are relevant to its purpose. For instance, suppose a key informant indicates that one of the main reasons that entrepreneurs are not taking loans in a small enterprise development project is the complex and cumbersome loan application procedure. The investigator can pursue this issue with other key informants, even though it was not included in the original interview guide. Such a change is not possible in sample surveys and censuses.

3. It is generally easy to find people with the necessary skills to conduct key informant interviews because most social scientists possess the professional training and experience required.

4. Key informant interviews are among the least expensive of the social science research methods. An investigator can carry out two or three interviews a day, needing only transportation support and possibly a translator. A useful study can sometimes be designed based on a dozen interviews.

Some disadvantages of this method are as follows:

1. Because key informant interviews provide only a very limited basis for quantification, they are rarely appropriate when quantitative data are needed. Decision-makers often expect precise, statistical data with which to design a project or monitor its progress. In such situations, key informant interviews cannot be used without survey-based data.

2. Findings can be biased if the informants are not carefully selected. One common error, especially when interviewers are not familiar with the local conditions, is to select

informants on the basis of their social and economic standing or their fluency in an international language rather than on their knowledge of the local situation. For example, it is not uncommon to rely largely on village elites for understanding the problems of small landholders or on government officials for examining the problem of nonutilization of technical assistance by small entrepreneurs. This problem can be easily avoided if a conscious effort is made to recruit key interviewees from a wider pool of knowledgeable informants.

3. Findings are susceptible to interviewer biases. For example, the interviewer picks up information and ideas that confirm his or her preconceived notions, gives more credence to the views of elites than to those from lower socioeconomic strata, or responds more to vivid descriptions and selective data than to abstract ideas and explanations. Thus it is imperative that investigators become familiar with these pitfalls.

4. When only a few people (fewer than 15) are interviewed, it may be difficult to demonstrate the validity of the findings. It is not easy to prove that the interviewees are, in fact, knowledgeable and informed and that they are representative of their peers in their information and recommendations.

2. PLANNING STUDIES USING KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

This section outlines the main steps that investigators should take before conducting key informant interviews: formulating study questions, reviewing available information, developing a conceptual framework, preparing an interview guide, and selecting key informants.

2.1 Formulating Study Questions

All studies commissioned by A.I.D. are undertaken to answer questions of interest to decision-makers and policy planners. Therefore, the obvious first step in planning a study is to precisely define the study objectives by listing the relevant questions. In some cases, questions are quite specific: Why is a particular health message not reaching women? Why are traders not interested in marketing contraceptives promoted by the project? In such instances, determining the questions relevant to the study objective is simple and straightforward and can be accomplished fairly easily. But when the purpose of the study is more general, as is the case with studies on designing, monitoring, and evaluating projects or programs, considerably greater thought is needed to clarify the study objectives and to determine the range of questions the study is to answer.

The number of study questions should be kept to a minimum, usually fewer than five. These may be expanded with a list of secondary questions, which are required to prepare an interview guide. Study questions, which should not be confused with the actual interview questions, should be as specific as possible. For example, "What is the role of women in the

project?" is less helpful than such questions as "In what project activities do women participate?" "Does the project address the needs of women as identified in the project paper?" "Are women taking advantage of the project's services?" "What effect has the project had on the economic conditions of women?"

A few clear study questions help to determine what is and what is not to be covered by an investigation. During a study, there is always a temptation to gather more information than can be used. The focus on study questions curbs this impulse. Scopes of work prepared by the project staff often list a large number of study questions. In such cases, investigators should discuss the subject with the staff concerned and negotiate necessary changes and improvements to the scope of work.

In studies of complex issues, study questions also help determine the mix of data collection methods. They can, for example, suggest which questions can be answered by sample surveys or field observations and which questions by key informant interviews.

2.2 Reviewing Available Information

When study questions have been formulated precisely, the next step is to conduct a review of available information, which may include the following:

Records and documents: Project and program records and documents include planning reports, project papers, internal reports such as those prepared monthly by extension or health workers, financial statements, progress reports submitted to host government agencies, midterm and terminal evaluations, and Country Development Strategy Statements. Depending on the nature of the study, such documents and records can provide useful quantitative and qualitative information. The Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (PPC/CDIE) keeps important A.I.D. records and documents and provides them to interested parties.

Published and unpublished studies: These include studies and investigations available from international donor organizations, government agencies, local universities, and research institutions. Investigations on similar programs or subjects can be very helpful in designing a study.

Although published material is usually accessible, unpublished studies can be extremely difficult to obtain because they are not catalogued by libraries and their existence is known only to the few individuals directly connected with them. Therefore, wherever possible, investigators should visit the offices of government ministries, universities, and donor agencies to obtain information about unpublished studies on the subject.

Statistics offices: During the past two decades, the growth in the availability of statistical data in developing countries has been phenomenal. Most governments systematically gather statistics on a variety of subjects, some of which may be directly related

to the planned study. For example, if key informant interviews are being conducted to design a regional development strategy, the investigators may find the background demographic and socioeconomic data in one of the statistics offices of the government.

Familiarity with background information makes key informant interviews more productive. It helps interviewers ask relevant questions and better interpret the observations made by respondents. Moreover, if interview findings agree with the data from other sources, the investigators feel confident about the validity of their findings. By the same token, if key informant perceptions of events differ from information on records or past findings, the disparities may raise additional questions.

2.3 Developing a Conceptual Framework

Many social scientists believe that a conceptual framework may constrain investigators by focussing the inquiry only on the variables and relationships it contains, resulting in flawed findings. Although there is some element of truth in this reasoning, a conceptual framework should still be developed before investigators venture into the field. A well-formulated, flexible framework helps to sharpen the focus of an inquiry and keep the interviews focused on critical issues.

At a minimum, a conceptual framework should indicate interrelationships among the key variables. For example, if a study is designed to find out the reasons for the poor demand for contraceptives in a project area, the investigator should prepare a list of the major factors and conditions that are expected to shed light on this subject. A careful review of the literature and preliminary talks with the project staff should produce this information. Such a list will provide a basis for developing interview guides. However, the initial list should be constantly reviewed and refined in response to the information gained from interviews. As the study progresses, new variables can be added and old ones deleted.

A necessary step at this stage is to clarify the main concepts to be used. Concepts such as family, illness, marriage, income, or food may be defined differently in different cultures and may not have the same meaning for both the interviewers and informants. Therefore investigators should adjust their workings to reflect local interpretation. Definitions should also be kept as simple as possible and reflect common usages of the terms.

Many data collection problems have resulted from failure to clarify the essential concepts. In one case, informants who were interviewed about food consumption habits made no mention of consuming any fruit. The study therefore concluded that because of inadequate diet, the population would be suffering from certain vitamin deficiencies--a conclusion that was not confirmed by clinical records. Follow-up interviews indicated that among the people studied, fruits were usually eaten as a snack between meals and were not considered food items. Interviewers had asked informants what food they ate, but their concept of food was different from that of the informants, leading to flawed conclusions. Thus when the possibility of different interpretations of the same terms exists, investigators

should pretest questions by talking with a few experts to learn how terms are used locally and to identify alternatives that may be more specific and easily understood.

2.4 Preparing an Interview Guide

After the conceptual framework is developed, the next task is to prepare an interview guide that lists the topics and issues to be covered during an interview. Unlike the questionnaire used in survey research, an interview guide does not mention each item to be covered. Nor does it contain specific questions and the order in which they are asked. Rather it is used to refresh the memory during the interview.

Because the purpose of key informant interviews is to explore a few issues in depth, the number of items listed in an interview guide is, in most instances, limited to 10 or 12. When an attempt is made to cover a wide range of topics and issues with a key informant, the discussion tends to become superficial. Fewer items leave more time to pursue leads. Box 1 gives excerpts from an interview guide used for the midterm evaluation of a water and sanitation project.

Usually, more issues or topics are covered in a session than are identified in an interview guide. This happens because as a key informant starts narrating his or her experiences or giving views and recommendations, the interviewer is likely to ask more penetrating questions or seek more details. For example, if a female informant indicates that a large number of women are participating in health education programs, the interviewer is likely to ask about the basis of her statement and the reasons for the large-scale participation of women in the project. The interviewer may also ask follow-up questions or request elaborations.

Different interview guides may need to be constructed for different categories of key informants in study. For example, the questions asked of senior government officials concerning a health project are likely to differ from those asked of school teachers and local health workers. However, in many cases, a single guide is adequate for most of the key informants if necessary, the interviewer can rephrase questions or focus only on the issues to which particular informants can best respond.

Box 1. Excerpts From an Interview
Guide for a Midterm Evaluation
of a Water and Sanitation Project

Maintenance of Pumps

- Problems faced by the users
- Suggestions and recommendations
- Feasibility of cost sharing for repairs

Effects of the Project

- Positive effects
- Evidence of effects or changes
- Reasons for success or lack of it
- Negative effects

General

- Assessment about long-term sustainability
- Basis for the assessment
- Suggestions for sustainability

If more than one person is involved in conducting in-depth interviews,, investigators should collectively review all the issues and develop an interview guide so that they share an understanding of their objective and of how to elicit the information they need. Even when the study is conducted by a single investigator, it is wise to get the inputs off other experts.

Contractors should idscuss the interview gguide with the appropriate A.I.D. official in charge of the study to receive necessary feedback and avoidd a posible misunderstanding later.

2.5 Selecting Key Informants

The quality of key informant interviews rests largely on choosing the right informants. Undoubtedly the most inportant consideration is that informants possess an initmate knowledge of the subject on which they will be interviewed. Such knowledge may be based on their special social positions, experience, participation in the project orr program, or professional expertise. A typical key informant is therefore very different from a typical respondent in sample surveys because of the depth of his or her knowledge and experience. Government officials, academic scholars and experts, local leaders, representatives of specialized groups, and members of the target populations usually make good key informants in project and program settings.

Sometimes a distinction is made between "typical" and "unique" informants; the former represent informants with widely held views, whereas the latter share minority or dissenting views. Although this distinction is heuristically useful, it is not always possible to know in advance who is a typical and who is a unique informant. Initial categorization may be unjustified and misleading. A government official who is initially regarded as typical may turn out to be unique because his or her perspective is at variance with the position of the government. Interview situations are full of surprises. However, the essential point is that efforts should be made to seek out respondents with divergent opinions and perspectives.

In selecting key informants, the first step is to identify the relevant groups from which they can be drawn. Investigators should select such groups with extreme care and provide the rationale for including or excluding a group. Box 2 offers an example of the groups from which key informants may be selected from an impact evaluation of a small business project for women.

The second step in this process is to select a few informants from each group. The common practice is to consult several knowledgeable persons in order to prepare a list of the possible informants. The list should usually be large enough to include substitutes in case some informants are not available. During the interviews key informants tend to suggest names of other persons who, in their opinion, are excellent key informants. It is prudent to make provision for such unplanned interviews at the outset of the study. Sometimes studies are explicitly designed from the beginning to use such "snowball" techniques in selecting interviewees. However, the decision on the number of key informants to interview for a study is generally based on the availability of time and resources, complexity of the issues involved, and the information available from other sources. The simple advice given to graduate students is that they should stop only when no new information is being uncovered. However, in project and program settings, time and resources are major constraints, and investigators have to contend with a less than optimal number of interviews.

As a rule of thumb, 15 to 35 key informants are sufficient for most studies. If investigations will be combining data collection methods, such as surveys, document content analysis, and key informant interviews, even fewer key informants may suffice. It should be noted that some interviews may be required strictly for reasons of protocol so that all those concerned feel they have had an opportunity to express their views.

Box 2. Example of Distribution of Informants

In the impact evaluation of a project designed to assist women starting small businesses, interviews might be held with individuals from the following groups:

- Government officials: Evaluators should interview government officials to learn about their views on the implementation, achievements, and failures of the project and the factors explaining them, and to seek their recommendations. Such interviews should be distinguished from those that are conducted from reasons of protocol (i.e., interviews done to avoid the appearance of slighting an official). The potential key informants are likely to be the officials of the ministries of industry, finance, and education who were connected with the project.
- Project staff: Interviewers should interview senior members of the management and technical assistance team and the concerned USAID Mission staff.
- Actual and potential women participants: Women may be the most important interviewees. Every effort should be made to ensure that women entrepreneurs who constitute the target population for the project are interviewed.
- Outsiders: Outsiders may be interviewed to assess the impact of government policies, regulations, economic infrastructure, economic climate, and cultural traditions and values on the implementation and effects of the project. These informants may include local and community leaders, representatives of business organizations, officials of banks and credit institutions, experts from bilateral and multilateral agencies active in business development, and local experts.

The number of interviews from each category may range from 4 to 6.

3. CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Conducting effective interviews with key informants is both an art and a science. Some people seem to have a natural talent for doing interviews, while others learn to do them gradually after considerable field experience. In any case, all interviewers can profit from the considerable literature on the subject contributed by social scientists. This section provides guidelines for conducting key informant interviews, focusing on initial contact with informants, wording and sequencing of questions, probing of informants, control of conversations, and recording of the interview.

3.1 Initial Contact

Initial contact is a critical part of the interview during which interviewers must establish rapport with key informants and create an atmosphere in which key informants are able to willingly communicate their views and opinions.

Key informants should be approached carefully for an interview. It is often useful to have introductions from senior government officials, project or program staff, or other influential persons. In many instances, people are not willing to be interviewed unless they are certain that the visit has been approved by concerned officials. There are times, however, when official sanctions may be unnecessary--and even undesirable.

Ideally, interviewers should make appointments with key informants to avoid scheduling conflicts. But sometimes interviewers must arrange for an interview without a previous appointment, in which case they should indicate that they are willing to come again at a time convenient to the key informant.

Interviewers should briefly explain their background, the objective of the interview, and the possible uses of the information and ideas provided by the key informant. They should also assure that key informant of the confidentiality of information. Some key informants, such as government officials and program managers, will expect fairly detailed descriptions of the study purposes, but others, such as program participants, may become confused with too much detail. As a rule of thumb, it is preferable to be brief and to the point, unless an informant seeks more detail.

Except when interviewing technical experts, interviewers should minimize the use of jargon and technical terms. Also, interviewers must be sensitive to and familiar with local cultural norms and behavior. Nonverbal communication is also important in such interviews.

3.2 Sequencing Questions

It is helpful to begin an interview with a minute or two of general conversation. The interviewer can ask for or volunteer information on a subject that might be of interest to the

informant. Brief preliminary talks can make the respondent comfortable, especially when interviewers come from different cultures.

Once some rapport has been established, the interviewer should proceed with factual questions. In an evaluation of a credit project, for example, an investigator can begin interviews policies, availability of credit from informal and formal sources, or the nature of the existing credit delivery systems. Because such questions are usually nonthreatening, people are willing to respond.

Questions requiring opinions and judgments should follow factual questions, after some level of trust has been established and the atmosphere is more conducive to candid replies. Such questions are designed to seek respondents' opinions on topics like the pressing problems faced by management teams, the effectiveness of the delivery systems, the reasons for the success or failure of an intervention, and the effects of a project or program. In phrasing such questions, interviewers should be extremely careful not to make the key informant uncomfortable in answering the questions. In many cultures, it is considered both imprudent and impolite to express views and opinions that might be interpreted as criticism of authorities, organizations, or specific individuals.

In general, it is best to begin with questions about the present and then move to those about the past. Because people's long-term memory recall is not always good, replies to questions about the past are notoriously inaccurate. Nevertheless, such questions are often necessary because they may uncover issues or problems that have direct relevance to the present situation. Questions about the future are speculative and may be difficult for some people to answer.

An interview proceeds more smoothly if transitional comments are used to introduce a new topic. To make the interview seem more like a natural conversation and less like a formal meeting, interviewers should use comments such as "Your description of the credit association has been very helpful. Now, I want to ask you a few questions about how people are using the money they borrow."

If a team is jointly conducting interviews, as in some project or program evaluations, it should develop an appropriate procedure so that, without intimidating the respondent, all members have a chance to ask questions. A simple approach is to designate one person as the primary interviewer and the others as secondary interviewers. After the primary interviewer has covered all the topics, he or she opens the interview to the others by asking them if they have any questions to ask. This procedure prevents the informant from being subjected to questions from several people at once and allows the interview to proceed smoothly.

Another way of conducting team interviews is to assign each member specific topics to cover and allocate the necessary time for each. For example, as part of an evaluation of a forestry program, a team of three with 1 hour for an interview can decide the following:

One member will take 15 minutes to ask questions about management of the program, another will have 155 minutes to ask technical questions about tree species and planting methods, and the third team member will be allocated 15 minutes to ask questions about program impacts. This leaves 15 minutes for introductions and follow-up questions. Specific topics can be assigned on the basis of individual expertise.

3.3 Wording of Questions

By definition, the key informant interview requires interviewers to frame questions extemporaneously. In wording questions, interviewers should keep in mind three major considerations.

First, questions should be simply worded, kept short, and phrased in the vernacular. For sophisticated informants, they can be phrased more formally.

Second, questions should be phrased to elicit detailed information. A common mistake is to ask questions that can be answered by a simple yes or no. Although such questions are highly suitable for formal surveys, they are inappropriate for key informant interviews, which are designed to provide deeper meanings, in-depth descriptions, and thoughtful explanations. Box 3 gives examples of questions that are likely to yield yes/no answers, paired with questions that are likely to elicit the desired responses.

Box 3. Examples of How Questions
About an Immunization Campaign Can Be
Rephrased To Elicit a Fuller Response

<u>Likely To Get a Yes or No Response</u>	<u>Likely To Get a Detailed Response</u>
Do you know about the vaccination campaign in this area?	Please tell me about the vaccination campaign in this area.
Was its primary objective to reduce the incidence of prevalent diseases?	Who initiated it? What was the justification for it?
Did traditional religious leaders object to it?	How did local leaders feel about it? Who supported and who opposed it?
Are people happy about it?	What are people saying about the campaign now?
Do you think that the campaign was responsible for reducing the incidence of disease among children?	What were the overall effects of the campaign on the health of an the incidences off illness among the children?

Furthermore, it is often tempting to put words into interviewees' mouths when they are reluctant to speak. Some impatient interviewers talking with a reticent informant rephrase their questions in a way that enables key informants to give simple yes or no answers. While this type of questioning may be good practice for journalists trying to pin down political leaders, it is unwise for key informant interviews.

Third, unrelated questions posed simultaneously tend to confuse the respondent and should be avoided. The respondent may not know which question to answer first and, in answering one, may fail to answer the second. Broader questions should be broken down into smaller, more concrete ones.

3.4 Role Playing

One technique for helping informants make abstract ideas more concrete, thus facilitating empathy and communication, is to ask the informant to assume a specific role. The interviewer asks informants what they would do if they were in another person's place. For example, instead of asking for general recommendations to improve the functioning of a clinic, the interviewer asks: "If you were the nurse in charge at the clinic, what changes would you make in its operation?" This technique is especially helpful when seeking suggestions and recommendations from project staff and participants.

However, key informants should be asked to assume only those roles with which they are likely to be comfortable. In many developing countries, junior officials may regard it as presumptuous to imagine themselves in the place of senior officials and may even be embarrassed by such a request. Interviewers should be aware of social, cultural, and political sensibilities when using a role-playing technique during interviews.

Role playing can also help reduce the embarrassment associated with sensitive questions. For example, in many cultures, women are not supposed to use contraceptives and are not likely to talk about them if they use them. In such situations, it is not wise to ask "Where do you go for information about family planning or to purchase contraceptives?" Interviewers are not likely to get truthful responses. A less threatening question is "Suppose a woman here wanted more information on family planning, where would she go to get it? Where can she get contraceptives?"

Sometimes the interviewer can assume a role. For example, he or she can ask: "Suppose I have been placed in charge of the microenterprise project in this area. What advice would you give me for making it more effective?"

3.5 Probing Techniques

Skillful probing is essential in seeking elaboration, details, and clarifications. Successful key informant interviews largely depend on the capacity of the interviewer to probe the respondent without in any way indicating that the respondent's answers are inadequate or not helpful. It is essential to maintain a conversational tone during probing so that the respondent does not feel that he or she is being cross-examined or interrogated.

When more details are required, both verbal and nonverbal signals can be given to the key informant. Often a nod of the head or a simple "yes" may be sufficient. Or the interviewer can ask for additional information by remarks such as "This is a crucial subject and I would appreciate it if you would give me more details," or "I am getting the picture, please continue."

It is often necessary to encourage key informants to move from generalities to specifics in order to learn the basis for their conclusions and recommendations. For example, in response to a general comment, "The water program has really changed things around here," the interviewer, in a natural manner, can probe for more detail: "What are the main

changes you have noticed?" "Who seems to benefit the most from the program?" "Can you give me some specific examples of changes?"

It is important that the interviewer take the blame for all failures to communicate and not give the impression that the informant is unclear or inarticulate. Comments like the following help to clarify the situation: "I'm sorry, but I'm not sure I got that point. Would you please repeat it?" or, "I'd like to be sure I understood you correctly. You said that your women's group has only met twice this year. Is that correct?"

Interviewers occasionally encounter a somewhat uncooperative key informant who does not provide the needed information or who deliberately distorts facts. In such instances, the interviewer should try to understand the reasons for the informant's behavior and, in the case of possible misunderstandings, deal with them. The interviewer can also move to other topics on which the informant is more forthcoming. However, if all attempts at a meaningful interview fail, the interview should be terminated. Some tips for such situations are given in Box 4.

3.6 Controlling Conversations

All interviewers encounter situations in which the respondent gives long and seemingly irrelevant answers. For example, the interviewer asks about the effectiveness of the marketing system for contraceptives, but the respondent gives a discourse on corruption in public affairs. In such situations the interviewer should be extremely patient and try to understand what the respondent is really trying to communicate. Some people do not want to speak directly but rather seek to convey pertinent messages indirectly. For example, in the interview on the effectiveness of the contraceptive marketing system, it is quite possible that the respondent is talking about financial irregularities in the marketing network that might have adversely affected its effectiveness. Thus comments that at first appear insignificant or irrelevant can often be productive.

Box 4. Probing Reluctant Key Informants

Even the best interviewers occasionally have difficulty getting informants to speak openly. Some problems and possible solutions are given below:

Problem: Informant gives only yes or no answers.

Possible solutions: Phrase questions so that they cannot be answered with one word. Allow the informant more time for answers. Begin with noncontroversial, descriptive information. Change the location if there is any possibility outsiders are listening. Break questions down into simple components and phrase them in the vernacular. If the key informant is a woman, have a woman interview her. Be sure that you are not in any way intimidating the respondent.

Problem: Informant does not give opinions.

Possible solutions: Assure the informant that all comments are confidential. Ask if the informant has some reasons for feeling uncomfortable with the interview. Find a private place for the interview and be sure no one else is listening. Try role playing. Recognize that the informant may not have any opinions if the questions are on an unfamiliar topic.

Problem: Informant is hostile.

Possible solutions: Listen carefully to the informant's response and try to understand the reasons for the apparent hostility. Show understanding without trying to patronize. Hostile informants may be excellent sources of information. Often, after the initial complaints, they settle down to describe the events that contributed to these feelings. If the informant is particularly important, schedule another interview or try a different, perhaps less formal, location. Focus on subjects about which the respondent is willing to talk. If an informant continues to be uncomfortable, guarded, or hostile, continue long enough to be polite and terminate the interview.

If a key informant is taking too much time with an irrelevant response, the best course is to use nonverbal communication. The interviewer can stop taking notes or nodding his or her head; he or she can glance away and break eye contact. Most respondents are quite sensitive to such reactions and get the message.

When nonverbal communication does not succeed, the interviewer can politely interrupt during the pause with statements such as, "What you said is very enlightening and I understand your point. Now I would like to know....." Or, "What you have said prompts me to ask another question....," and then proceed to a different topic.

3.7 Maintaining a Neutral Attitude

An interviewer should be a sympathetic listener and avoid giving the impression of having strong views on the subject under discussion. An attitude of neutrality is essential because some key informants try to be polite and courteous by saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear. To avoid this "courtesy bias," the interviewer should not voice personal opinions. After all, the objective of the interview is to find out what the informant thinks and why.

It is sometimes difficult to convince an informant that the interviewer is there to seek his or her views on a controversial subject. Key informants, especially those from economically deprived groups, are not accustomed to giving their views and are unsure of what is expected of them. But they gradually become reassured during the interview when they realize that their views and opinions are being taken seriously and that the interviewer is not there to disagree or argue with them.

Several strategies can be pursued for dealing with controversial issues. The first strategy is for the interviewer to stress that the purpose of the study is to seek information and ideas and that an accurate judgment can only be made when the study is over. Such a posture, though evasive, can encourage the respondent to only express views on a subject. In many cases, the key informant gets the impression that the interviewer has not come with preconceived notions and conclusions and is open to new information and ideas.

The second strategy is for the interviewer to demonstrate familiarity with the subject by stating both sides of the issue but without taking a position. Suppose a study is being undertaken to recommend a suitable agricultural extension system and there is sharp division among the policymakers about the suitability of the training and visit system of agricultural extension. The interviewer can list some of the arguments given by the proponents and critics of the proposed system and ask the key informant to comment on them. The advantage of this course is that the informant learns that the interviewer is aware of the divergent views on the subject.

A third strategy is to candidly express one's views and engage in an honest dialogue. This strategy is most suitable in interviews with key informants who do not feel constrained in expressing their views. For example, the interviewer can state to the senior official of a host country that he or she believes the private sector should be given a primary role in the distribution of agricultural inputs but would like to hear the official's views on the subject.

Sometimes technical experts conducting key interviews feel obliged to educate and

correct informants. For instance, a medical professional who interviews the staff nurse in a family planning clinic may find that the nurse is ill informed on a subject and be tempted to correct the nurse. The proper course in such situations is for the interviewer to wait until the interview is over and then suitably advise the informant about the subject.

Box 5 provides some tips for successful communication during key informant interviews.

3.8 Using Translators During Interviews

Involvement of a translator usually changes the dynamics of an interview by making the interactions more formal, thus inhibiting a free exchange of ideas and information. Moreover, if there are significant differences in status between the translator and informant, both may feel constrained. For example, senior government officials may be reluctant to give candid answers in the presence of a junior staff member serving as translator; conversely, low-status informants may be intimidated by high-status translators.

Another problem with using translators is that much information is lost in the translation process. Many translators do not fully and accurately translate the conversation and tend to summarize, elaborate, or interpret questions and answers.

Box 5. Tips for Successful Communication in Interviews

1. Give the informant full attention. Maintain as much eye contact as is possible and appropriate. Take notes, but do so as inconspicuously as possible. Keep the interview guide where you can refer to it without interrupting the rhythm of the conversation.
2. Begin the interview with a warm-up. Ask the informant about noncontroversial topics. Share personal information and give the informant a chance to ask questions about you and the purpose of the interview.
3. Always confirm that the informant had time for the interview. Tell the informant about how long the interview is expected to last; reschedule if the time is not convenient.
4. Be alert to who else is listening to the conversation because people are sometimes reluctant to speak in the presence of others. The possible difficulty of finding privacy for an interview is offset by the reduced risk of bias that such privacy affords.
5. Do not rush the informant. Some people need time to reflect on sensitive questions or like to pause between thoughts. Rapid-fire questions can be disconcerting to the informant and may give the impression that the respondent's answers are too long or irrelevant.
6. Repeat the main points of the informant's responses. Such phrases as, "Then your feeling on this point is..." or "Did I understand correctly that..." help summarize responses and show that the interviewer is listening carefully.
7. Be neutral no matter how misinformed or preposterous the informant's views seem. Informants have a right to their opinions, and one reason for the interview is to determine their reasoning about and understanding of an issue. Be careful of nonverbal signs that may indicate approval or disapproval of an informant's comments.
8. If an informant has difficulty talking about a sensitive subject, try depersonalizing it. Rather than say, "I am interested in knowing why your office has refused to cooperate with this program," try, "I have heard that some people here have been critical of the program, and I wonder if you can tell me what some of their criticisms have been?"
9. Always ask informants for specific examples to back up generalizations. Specific incidents, events, or activities provide useful anecdotes for the study and are helpful in understanding the basis for the informant's opinions. The informant's interpretation of concepts may be different from yours. If the informant says something happens often but is unable to give more than one example, then he or she may be generalizing from the one event or only repeating what others have said.

Problems are compounded when translators are not quite proficient in one or the other of the languages or do not understand the topics on which the interviews are being conducted.

Nevertheless, the use of translators may often be unavoidable. In such situations,

translators should be carefully selected and briefed. Preferably they should not be known to the respondent. When the key informant and the translator do not know each other, problems of status are naturally minimized.

The interviewer should thoroughly brief the translator on the purposes of the study and the technical issues involved. The interviewer should also provide the translator with an overall view of the study if the translator is not familiar with the subject (e.g., types of contraceptives used or the nature and functions of the cooperative bank). A knowledge of the study objectives and program details improves the quality of communication and reduces the possibility of misunderstanding.

If the translator should repeat the respondent's comments as they are made and use, as closely as possible, the same phraseology. The translator should never summarize or only translate what he or she thinks is important. Nothing is more frustrating than to have an informant give a long, thoughtful response to a question and have the translator say, "Oh, he simply described his problems in getting technical assistance from the government."

During the interview, the interviewer should face the informant and address all questions to him or her directly. The translator can sit to the side where he or she can hear both people. Prior to the interview, the key informant should be assured that both the translator and the interviewer will hold all information confidential.

It is often useful to conduct a trial session before commencing key informant interviews by having a person fluent in both languages serve as an informant. A trial session helps to identify problems that may plague interviews and the ways in which they can be resolved.

3.9 Recording the Interview

The interviewer should take extensive notes during the interview, assuming that it is acceptable to the key informant. Without detailed notes, comments are unduly summarized, details are forgotten, and subtlety is lost.

Experience shows that few key informants object to note taking, especially when notes are taken on all their comments and not just on those that may be sensitive. If informants seem uncomfortable with note taking, the interviewer should assure them of complete confidentiality and explain that their comments are extremely important and need to be written down so as not to be forgotten.

Ideally, everything the informant says should be recorded. When notes are taken selectively, interviews can become biased because the informants tend to focus on issues on which the interviewer takes note. Moreover, several items of information that appear trivial or insignificant at first may prove to be important and relevant later.

Interviewers should be able to take notes rapidly to keep the conversation moving. The use of abbreviations and codes make note taking faster. Most experienced interviewers construct their own sets of abbreviations for commonly used terms. When taking notes, the interviewer should have extra space to fill in missing words or write details later.

At the end of the interview, the interviewer must review the notes for legibility, fill in the blanks, write out the abbreviations, and underscore items that appear to be important or relevant.

In addition to recording the verbal responses of key informants, interviewers should note their nonverbal behaviors. Often facial expressions reveal more than what an informant says. For example, if a respondent seems skeptical or uncomfortable responding to questions about the effectiveness of credit delivery to women farmers, the interviewer to examine the review the informant's responses more carefully when the time comes to analyze the data.

Finally, interviewers should carefully record their own impressions, feelings, and insights. Key informant interviews are a two-way process in which interviewers and respondents stimulate each other. Therefore it is not uncommon for the remarks made by a respondent to generate new ideas and insight in the mind of the interviewer. Such thoughts should be immediately noted but kept separate from the responses of the key informant. A common error in team interviews is that interviewers' notes do not distinguish between the observations of key informants and those of team members.

3.10 Using Tape Recorders

With the availability of inexpensive tape recorders, their use has become widespread in key informant interviews for several reasons. Interviewers are spared the trouble of taking notes and thus can focus primarily on the discussions. Moreover, tape provides a verbatim, authentic record of the interview in which no detail is lost, which is important for analytical purposes. Sometimes common themes or issues emerge halfway through the data-collection stage and it is helpful to go back through earlier interviews to see when they first emerged.

Despite these advantages, interviewers should be extremely cautious about using tape recorders, for several reasons. Tape recorders can intimidate key informants and make them reluctant to discuss sensitive issues. People in developing countries may not be accustomed to their use and feel inhibited by them. In addition, the use of tape recorders can change the nature of the interview. Respondents tend to become more formal, and the interview takes on the tone of official business. Moreover, in many instances the rhythm of the conversation is disturbed because of a noisy machine or because the interviewer must stop the interview to change the tape or the batteries.

If the interviewer wants to tape the interview, the permission of the key informant should be obtained beforehand. Even if the informant agrees, the use of the tape recorder should be discontinued if there is any indication of discomfort.

Even if a tape recorder is used, the interviewer should take extensive notes to ensure a record of the interview in case of any mechanical failure. Moreover, as indicated earlier, the interviewer often gains fresh ideas and insight during the interview. Such thoughts cannot be recorded by a tape recorder. Nor can a tape recorder record the nonverbal behavior of the respondent. Finally, transcribing tapes is quite expensive and time consuming. therefore, written notes can save time and resources.

3.11 Translation

If at all possible, all interviews should be carried out and written in the same language. An interview cannot be conducted in one language and simultaneously translated into another without loss of time and detail. the best time for translation is after notes have been completed and typed. Care should be taken that detail is not lost in translation.

If professional translators are used, the standard method for checking consistency is to have the record translated into the desired language and then have another translator retranslate it into the language used in the interview. If the original and retranslated versions are identical, the accuracy of the translation is ensured.

4. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

Past experience indicates that the analysis in most of the studies using key informant interviews is deficient. Investigators are often overwhelmed by the voluminous interview data in which information, insights, and recommendations are scattered without any logical sequence. The most common practice is for investigators to read through the interview texts and then frame the findings and conclusions. Obviously such practice hardly permits optimal use of data and can even lead to erroneous findings and conclusions.

There are many simple, practical techniques that can facilitate insightful analysis of interview data. This section describes some of those that do not require much time and effort: interview summary sheets, descriptive codes, storing and retrieval systems, and presentation of data.

4.1 Interview Summary Sheet

A useful aid in analyzing interview data is a one-page summary sheet that summarizes the main findings of an interview. To save time, a summary should be prepared when field notes are developed by the interviewer.

The main advantage of a summary sheet is that it enables investigators to reduce vast amounts of information into manageable themes that can be easily examined. A summary sheet also enables team members conducting individual interviews to review each other's notes when they are unable to prepare typed transcriptions for immediate circulation.

Each interview summary sheet should provide information about the key informant, the reasons for his or her inclusion in the study, the informant's main observations, the implications of these observations, the interviewer's assessment of the key informant, and any insights and ideas that evolved during the interview. Box 6 provides an example of an interview summary sheet that was used in a southern African country. The purpose of this study was to determine the major causes for farmers' lack of demand for long-term loans to purchase tractors.

4.2 Use of Descriptive Code

Coding involves a systematic recording of data. In quantitative studies, investigators assign a number for all possible values of a variable. For example, if a question asks about the effects of social and cultural factors on the participation of women, the responses can be classified in three to five categories ranging from "no/negligible" to "very high," and the investigator may assign code 1 to "no/negligible" and a 3 (or a 5) to "very high." Because the purpose of key informant interviews is captured by numbers, numeric coding is not a practical evaluation technique for use in development settings.

The investigator can, however, use short abbreviations as descriptive codes to label data, usually a comment from key informants, under an appropriate category. Like numeric codes, these descriptive codes are organized around relevant ideas, concepts, questions, or themes. The usual practice is to not them on the left-hand margin of the interview text. A short sheet is then prepared that lists page numbers devoted to particular items, which later become subheadings in the text.

For example, a midterm evaluation of a microenterprise project examines several issues, including managerial performance, disbursement of credit, participation of women, the effects of the intervention on income, and project sustainability. For the purpose of descriptive coding, the evaluation team may treat these major issues for each of the main categories. Table 1 illustrates the use of this technique.

Descriptive codes can be developed either at the design stage or on completion of the interview process. In the case of the former, the interviewer relies on his or her own expertise and deductive logic. For example, in the evaluation of the microenterprise project mentioned above, the evaluation team might have hypothesized at the design stage that cultural barriers, lack of suitable collateral, limited business experience, and project staff apathy largely explain the low participation of women in the project. If the investigator waits to develop codes after all interviews have been completed, coding categories are empirically grounded as they reflect the actual comments of the informants rather than the initial conceptual framework of the investigator.

Both approaches have their advantages and limitations. The advantage of precoding is that it saves time. Since the coding scheme is finalized early, coding can be done as soon as an interview text is ready. The obvious limitation is that coding categories may not be appropriate. However, coding after completing the interviews ensures more empirically relevant categories but is certainly time-consuming.

Table 1. Example of a Coding System for the Evaluation of a Microenterprise Project

General Description	Code	Transcript Page Numbers
<u>Women's Participation</u>	WOM-PAR	
Cultural factors	WOM-PAR-CUL	7, 9, 33, 45, 46, 180
Business Experience	WOM-PAR-BE	15, 54, 143
Collateral Requirements	WOM-PAR-COL	28, 35, 107, 155
Management Apathy	WOM-PAR-MA	21, 60, 103, 179
Others	WOM-PAR-OTH	11, 26, 33, 61, 77, 83
<u>Project Effects</u>	EFF	
Income	EFF-INC	3, 31, 102-3, 185
Employment	EFF-EMP	5, 33-4, 163, 181-2
<u>Project Sustainability</u>	SUS	
Credit	SUS-CRE	17, 86-7, 143, 172-4
Technical Assistance	SUS-TA	31, 89-90, 107-8, 155
Government Support	SUS-GS	147-8, 176-8, 187-8
Public Support	SUS-PS	139-41, 187, 199-200

The best approach to coding is to develop the categories and subcategories after several (8 to 10) interviews have been completed. Such a course combines the advantages of both approaches. After conducting several interviews, the investigator has a better idea of what categories and subcategories are realistic and relevant and can develop the coding scheme without loss of much time.

Several considerations should guide the development of a coding scheme. First, the categories should be clear and precise, which is usually not a problem because in key informant interviews the investigator develops them. In studies involving several interviewees, coding can be done by more than one person to improve reliability. Second, a code should focus on a broad theme; otherwise the list of codes becomes unmanageable, thus defeating its purpose.

Third, data can be double coded. Often the comments made by an informant are appropriate for more than one category. For instance, a respondent may explain why extension workers are not performing well and suggest a crash training program for them. In this case, the investigator may code the respondent's comments as both an explanatory

variable for ineffective extension services and a recommendation for the future. Fourth, coding should be selective. Not all points made during an interview should be coded. Interview data usually contain all kinds of information, some of which may not be pertinent to the study questions at all. Obviously, it is a waste of time and resources to code irrelevant information. Finally, as far as possible, the coding system should be both developed and applied by the investigator.

4.3 Storing and Retrieval System

Once interviews have been coded, the next logical step is to design a simple storage and retrieval system so that the investigator can easily locate relevant items of information. The whole process is simplified if investigators have access to a word processor or computer program that allows users to sort material. In such a case, relevant portions of the interview texts can be organized according to their codes. For example, all the comments relating to women's participation can be put together. Thus the investigator has access to two sets of typed material: individual interview texts and the texts organized according to relevant themes or study questions.

When a word processor or computer is not available, the best course is to prepare separate folders for each major subject area. For example, in the case of the midterm evaluation of a microenterprise project, evaluators may use 8 to 10 folders to cover all the topics. Thus, for example, they will have separate folders for women's participation, project effects, sustainability, and so on. As they get additional interview texts, they will cut and paste them on separate sheets or index cards in accordance with the coding scheme and file them in the appropriate folder.

Each index card or sheet should have an identification mark so that the comment or observation can be attributed to a specific source. Detached sheets or cards free the data from time, place, and sequence constraints and enable the investigator to use them in creative ways. They can be arranged, shuffled, and reshuffled indefinitely until underlying patterns begin to surface.

4.4 Presenting Data

Visual displays (e.g., tables, boxes, figures) condense vast volumes of data and present them in a clear format, bringing to the surface the underlying relationships, patterns, or trends. Moreover, they help to communicate the findings to key decision-makers and policy-makers who may not have time to read long descriptions. Examples of visual displays that can be constructed on the basis of key informant interview data are given below.

Table 2 compares the problems faced by male and female participants in obtaining credit from the project.

Table 2. Problems Encountered in Obtaining

Institutional Credit

Male Farmers	Female Farmers
Collateral requirements	Collateral requirements
Considerable paperwork	Considerable paperwork
Long delays in getting loans	Long delays in getting loans
Repayment installments not synchronized with agricultural seasons	Repayment installments not synchronized with agricultural seasons
	Land registered in the name of male members
	Difficulty going to the cities where the bank is located
	Apathy of the bank staff toward women

Table 2 shows clearly that women face several more problems than men in obtaining institutional credit. For example, since the land is registered in the name of their spouses, women have difficulty in providing collateral for credit. They also find it difficult to visit cities where the credit institution is located.

In constructing Table 2, the investigator used his or her own language to describe the problems faced by potential borrowers. However, actual quotes from the respondents can also be used, as shown in Box 7.

Box 7 shows varying assessments of project effects. It indicates that the project contributed to increased income of participants but that women did not benefit as much as men because of such factors as a lack of experience, limited demand for handicraft products, and poor judgement of the project staff. The main advantage of using the respondents' words is that direct quotes reduce the chances of bias and have more credibility in the eyes of the reader.

Finally, visual displays can be constructed to give frequencies, as Table 3 shows. The table summarizes the suggestions made by key informants for a participant training program in a South Asian Country.

Table 3. Recommendations by Key Informants

Recommendation	Number of Respondents
Develop need-based training courses	39
Develop objective selection procedures	20
Give greater attention to the selection of training institution	11
Plan job placement after training	9
Design long-range training plans and policies	8
Develop follow-up and refresher courses	6
Place more emphasis on in-country training	4
Establish alumni association for the trainees	4

5. IMPROVING THE RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF FINDINGS

Once the tentative findings are made, it is necessary to review them carefully for accuracy and to ensure that they are grounded in empirical reality. As was mentioned in the first section, key informant interviews are susceptible to error, biases, and misinterpretations, which may lead to flawed conclusions and recommendations. The steps described below can help reduce most common sources of bias and errors in key informant studies and thereby help to improve the accuracy of the findings.

5.1 Checking for "Representativeness"

Because key informants are not selected through random sampling and their numbers are small, the possibility exists that certain groups or organizations may be overlooked in the study design or cannot be reached for interviews. Therefore, before finalizing the results, investigators should take a second look at the list of key informants to ensure that it is fairly representative. If there are significant omissions, the situation should be corrected by interviewing additional key informants. For example, if investigators find that women farmers were not included in the original list for the evaluation of an agricultural credit project, efforts should be made to interview a few of them. When additional interviews are not possible because of time or resources, the investigator should review the findings carefully to ensure that the perspective, needs, or concerns of the missing group or organization have been considered for analysis purposes.

5.2 Assessing the Key Informants

In sample surveys the responses from all respondents, irrespective of their socioeconomic characteristics, level or expertise, and stake in the project or program, are assigned equal weight. In sharp contrast, investigators conducting a study based on key informant interviews discriminate between "good" and "bad" key informants and give more salience to the comments and observations of the former. The reliability of key informants can be assessed in terms of several criteria:

- Knowledgeability: A good key informant has firsthand knowledge of the issues and is therefore in a position to give accurate information. If the informant is relying on secondary sources, they, too, must be proven reliable and accurate.
- Credibility: The key informant answers questions thoughtfully and candidly. He or she is perceptive about the issues and does not exaggerate or play up his or her own importance.
- Impartiality: In some cases, a key informant may have an ulterior motive for providing inaccurate information. For example, it is not uncommon for the management staff to exaggerate the positive in the project's performance and accomplishments and the problems in project implementation. A respondent whose comments are overly positive or negative does not make a good key informant.
- Willingness to respond: If, for some reason, an informant was not totally cooperative during the interview, his or her hesitancy should be considered during the data analysis stage.
- Outside constraints: The presence of outsiders during the interview can seriously influence responses. For example, project participants are less spontaneous in the presence of program managers than when they are alone with the interviewer. An added problem in some studies is that interviewers are accompanied by two or three staff members. The arrival of a group of "officials" also intimidates some key informants, especially those from low socioeconomic strata.

Because some informants are better than others in terms of the criteria given above, the investigator should ensure that greater weight is given to the information provided by the "good" informants.

5.3 Checking Interviewer or Investigator Bias

The third, and probably most important, step in improving the reliability of findings is

for the investigator to look at his or her own biases that may have affected interviews and the analysis of the data generated by them. Particular attention should be given to the following:

1. Hypotheses confirmation bias: The most persistent bias in key informant interviews arises from a focus on the information and ideas that confirm the investigator's preconceived notions and hypotheses. Investigators should take great care to demonstrate total objectivity and not ignore contradictory ideas. A common solution is to write down the preferred hypotheses and search for evidence negating them. Another approach is to share the data with other experts and examine the conclusions they draw from it.

2. Consistency bias: In order to draw meaningful inferences, investigators seek consistency and search for coherence in the disparate, often irreconcilable, remarks of key informants. However, seeking consistency at too early a stage in a study can lead to flawed findings because investigators may overlook evidence that is inconsistent with the findings or earlier interviews.

For example, a series of key informant interviews is being conducted to determine where to locate a national information system to monitor social and economic effects of structural adjustment. During the early stage of the study, several key informants present a powerful argument in favor of locating the information system in the ministry of social welfare. They suggest that the ministry is the logical choice because it is concerned with the conditions of poor and disadvantaged groups who might be adversely affected by structural adjustment policies. Later in the study, however, other key informants suggest that the information system be placed in the ministry of finance, but the investigator may ignore the suggestions because they are inconsistent with earlier findings. Such instances are quite common in key informant interviews.

Apparent inconsistencies in findings can contribute to fresh insights or recommendations if the investigator pursues them further. Finding out why people have had very different experiences with a project or hold diverse opinions on a subject can be essential to understanding how to design a program or improve its performance. In any case, it is important that the investigator draw no premature conclusions.

3. Elite bias: The key informants who come from elite groups, such as senior government officials, university professors and researchers, project and program staff, and elected officials, tend to be articulate and have a sense of authority that leads the investigator to give more weight to their opinions than to those of other groups. It is therefore important that the findings be reexamined to ensure that the interviewer was not partial to the views and comments of the elite key informants.

4. Concreteness bias: A key informant who provides vivid descriptions may be given more credence than others who make substantive points without providing concrete illustrations. In interview situations, it is not uncommon for an informant to describe an isolated event in great detail, thus making a deep impression on the interviewer. Similarly,

statistics or financial data may impress an interviewer even though such data may be partial or even inaccurate. Investigators should be conscious about such biases.

5.4 Checking for Negative Evidence

The investigator should also make a conscious effort to look for data that question the preliminary findings of the study. Such an exercise often brings to the surface issues that were earlier ignored or overlooked and makes the analysis more cogent and rigorous.

In one study, key informant interviews were conducted to determine the most effective mode for distributing contraceptives in rural areas. The majority of the respondents indicated that people would prefer contraceptive to be sold at village groceries where they could be easily obtained. This recommendation was formulated as the finding. However, when reviewing the interview data to check for negative evidence, the investigator noted that many informants recommended health centers instead of grocery stores for reasons of privacy, which prompted a closer look at the notes and a discussion of the issue with other experts. Such efforts revealed that the preferences for the two modes of contraceptive distribution were closely related to the marital status of the users: married users preferred distribution in groceries for the sake of convenience while unmarried users preferred distant, remote health centers where they would not be seen.

5.5 Getting Feedback from Informants

Finally, the validity of findings can be increased by obtaining feedback from a few key informants in one of two ways. One way is to prepare a brief summary of the findings and share it with the available key informants. This course is not very practical, especially in rural areas where key informants are not literate. Moreover, few have the time and motivation to give their written comments. The second and more practical way is to organize a meeting or focus group in which the major findings are presented. In either case, the key informants are given an opportunity to clarify points they feel were misunderstood or ignored, question the reasoning behind findings, and present their arguments and opinions.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, key informant interviewing is one of several rapid, low-cost modes of data collection that can be used in developing countries. Such interviews can generate information, ideas, insights, and recommendations for project and program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. However, they need to be properly planned and conducted and the resultant data carefully analyzed to generate useful findings and recommendations.

It is therefore necessary that the concerned A.I.D. staff prepare precise, well-written scopes of work for the key-informant-based studies. The scope of work should provide a

description of the purpose and background of the study and clearly spell out study questions. It should also give a broad idea of the number of interviews to be conducted, the types of key informants who are most appropriate, and the needed skills and expertise on the part of the investigator. Guidelines for preparing scopes of work for studies based on rapid, low-cost data collection methods are given in A.I.d. Program Design and Evaluation Methodology Report No. 10 (PN-AA1-100).

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Finsterbusch, K., J. Ingersoll, and L. Llwewlyn, eds. Forthcoming Fitting Projects: Method for Social Analysis in Developing Countries. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications

A methodology book focusing on different data collection techniques including surveys, rapid rural appraisals, and interviews. This book is particularly strong because the authors all have extensive practical experience in the field.

Casley, Dennis J., and Krishna Kumar. 1988. The Collection, Analysis, and Use of Monitoring and Evaluation Data. The World Bank. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.

A review of alternative methodologies including interviews, participant observation, and surveys, with special reference to agriculture, although all the methods are useful in other sectors. The book places particular emphasis on the statistical analysis of quantitative data from surveys.

Den Hollander, A.N.J. 1967. "Social Description: The Problem of Reliability and Validity." In Anthropologists in the Field, edited by D.G. Jongmans and P.C. Gutkind, 1-34. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum and Company.

This classic article struggles with the issue of the extent to which it is possible to observe social reality and describe it in a way that is scientifically valuable. The author describes in detail some of the problems of gathering good qualitative data including a discussion of objectivity, researcher bias, and communication problems.

Kumar, Krishna. 1987. Conducting Group Interviews in Developing Countries. A.I.D. Program Design and Evaluation Methodology Report No. 8. Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development.

This monograph suggest guidelines for using group interviews, including how to carry out group interviews, how to structure them, and how the interviewer can be aware of and avoid bias.

Kumar, Krishna. 1987. Rapid, Low-Cost Data Collection Methods. A.I.D. Program Design and Evaluation Methodology Report No. 10. Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development.

This monograph summarizes five rapid, low-cost methods of collecting data. The methods include key informant interviews, focus groups, community interviews, direct observation, and informal surveys. For each method, the advantages, limitations, costs, and skills required are discussed.

Bib-2

Miles, Matthew B., and A. Michael Huberman . 1984. Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.

This book introduces much of the rigor of quantitative analysis into qualitative methods. It is most useful for carrying out major studies for which investigators have considerable time and resources for analysis; the emphasis is on coping information and analysis through building matrices. It is less useful for smaller studies with limited time for analysis.

Patton, Michael Q. 1980. Qualitative Evaluation. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.

Patton, Michael Q. 1982. Practical Evaluation. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.

Patton's books have become classics in the field of qualitative data collection. They contain useful discussions on a variety of ways to collect information through observation and various types of interviews. The books focus on data collection; less attention is given to analysis.

Pelto, P. J., and G.H. Pelto. 1970. Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A standard anthropological methods text, this volume discusses the techniques of observation, interviewing, simple surveys, mapping, and others. Analysis of data is discussed in terms of theory and model construction.

Spradley, James P. 1979. The Ethnographic Interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

The book offers a rigorous methodology for in-depth interviews. The method presumes a series of interviews with informants over time. Using a linguistic model, the interviewer identifies domains and a taxonomy of concepts leading to a componential analysis of interviews. Although the methodology is more complex than most interviewers need, the book nevertheless offers valuable advice on how to work with informants. The examples come largely from urban U.S. studies.

Young, Frank W., and Ruth C. Young. 1961. "Key Informant Reliability in Rural Mexican Villages." Human Organization 20:141-148.

The authors carried out controlled studies to test the reliability of information collected through interviews and determined that factual information about the present is much more reliable than opinions and information from the past.