
Knowledge acquisition

Guidelines and interviewing strategies for
acquiring relevant local knowledge

Preparation (1)

- Do some preliminary research into the area so you have an idea about the socio-economic context before you start interviewing
 - Make sure you're aware of local languages, social groupings (e.g. tribe, caste), customs that you will need to observe so you don't cause offence
 - If you're working with a translator it is important to prepare him/her so they know what kind of questions you will be asking and how you would like them to translate the answers (word for word if possible)
 - Be aware there might be problems with the translator understanding what exactly you want so you need to explain **before** entering the field.
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Preparation (2)

- From researching the area beforehand and also doing some scoping by talking to local people, you should then have an idea about what stratification would be most appropriate
 - According to the strata, decide a sampling strategy (5 of each strata would be a start) and then start organising how, when and where interviews can take place
 - Be aware that just turning up to a farm without prior arrangements might not be appropriate
 - Take into consideration people's working and resting hours and when they might be available to talk to you
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Interview location

- Ideally interviews should take place in the field rather than in the farmer's house, but if this is not possible repeat interviews with the farmer in a farm location are highly recommended
- Depending on **where** you interview someone, the information they give you may be different
 - This is why it is valuable to conduct interviews on farms when trying to collect agro-ecological knowledge.
 - It helps the farmer and the interviewer to have reference points immediately available

[Video of interviewing in the field](#)

Interview technique

- During the first interview with a farmer, depth interviews are vital for making everyone feel relaxed and interested in talking to you
 - Farmers will be more friendly and happy to give you information if you explain what you are doing and who you are
 - You might find that you can move onto a more semi-structured interview style during the first interview and this is recommended for further interviews
 - Semi-structured interviews help to keep you and the farmer focused on relevant topics
 - Ask questions based on “**how/ what/ why?**” and probe further
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Interview length

- Whether interviews last 10 minutes or 2 hours they can still produce the same amount of useful knowledge, it all depends on how you ask questions and what the farmer wants to talk about
 - 1 hour is usually enough but be flexible – the farmer might be happy to talk for longer, but do not assume that the farmer has plenty of time to talk to you
 - If they don't have much time when you approach them, try and arrange another time
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Recording interviews

- Voice recorders are useful but not to be relied on in case they don't work properly during interviews
 - **Remember** to ask permission before using a recording device and explain that it is just being used to help you go through the interview later
 - Notepads need to be used all the time for recording as much as possible
 - Notepads can also be used for reminding you what topics need to be covered during interviews
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Analysing interviews

- Always try to go through interviews straight after they've taken place, while they're still fresh in your mind
 - This will help you get the most from the interview because you'll be able to remember implicit knowledge communicated by the farmer through body language (e.g. pointing at trees) and comments made during the interview
 - From analysing what you've got from interviews, you are able to think about what other questions need to be asked and how to improve your interviewing technique
 - You can then organise repeat interviews to clarify unclear answers and to ask newly formed questions
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Behaviour during interviews

- Approach interviews as a student and wanting to **learn** from farmers rather than teach
 - Don't assume a position of superiority, make sure you communicate with farmers that you want to understand **their** knowledge
 - Respect people and always offer feedback sessions so they can see what you have got from the interviews
 - Make sure to carry out what you say you're going to do
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Don't forget

- Don't rely on just AKT methodological approach for collecting local knowledge
 - Experiment with any methods that you think will be fruitful and complementary
 - Participatory methods, e.g. focus group discussions, ranking and scoring exercises, farm layout diagrams, livelihood and landuse diagrams.
 - Quality interviews rather than quantity
 - 20 interviews with well covered areas of relevant knowledge are much more useful than 50 basic interviews that are only partially related to the research purpose
 - Don't be scared to ask 'obvious' questions – these questions are very important for understanding what farmers are talking about
 - Remember, you are **learning** so ask for explanations about what farmers are telling you
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Acquisition strategy

