

Methodologies for information gathering

(Taken from Gender Perspectives: a gender training pack of the International Federation of the Red Cross)

Introduction

There are many different ways of gathering information on the vulnerabilities, capacities and needs of individuals at the community level. Planning in advance is important to ensure that you obtain information from women as well as men. For gender-related information, often participatory methods are the best.

Uses

The list below summarizes a range of information-gathering methods. Every method has its own strengths and limitations with some methods being more participatory than others. Which information-gathering methods are the most appropriate for a given National Society will depend on the specific context and information needs. When an approach to information-gathering has been chosen, an action plan on the modalities of collecting the information can be developed. Often a combination of methods is a good strategy.

How to choose which information-gathering method to use

Primary sources of information allow the National Society staff to access original and unedited information. A primary source requires staff to interact with the source and extract information.

Secondary sources are edited primary sources, second-hand versions such as reference materials, reports, books, CD-Roms, encyclopedias, internet websites, magazines, newspapers, video tapes, audio tapes, TV, reviews of other agencies' primary sources of information. Secondary sources represent someone else's thinking.

- § Review the different primary information-gathering methods outlined below.
- § Decide which are relevant for collecting gender-related information and suit your particular information needs. Find out more about this methodology if necessary.
- § Use the chart at the end to plan your information needs.

Participatory or rapid appraisal methods

These refer to informal methods used to obtain detailed, practical information directly from project clients or beneficiaries. They include methods such as Venn diagrams, seasonal calendars, resource picture cards, transect maps and benefit flow diagrams.

Structured interviews

Use a pre-prepared list of set questions. The same questions can be asked of a number of individuals and their different answers compared. Remember that one-to-one interviews have a tendency to yield irrelevant or inaccurate information. If the interviewee is poor (and/or of limited education) s/he might be tempted to say what s/he thinks the interviewer wants to hear. There is a risk that the interviewee perceives there to be a 'correct' answer, which does not necessarily reflect his/her genuine belief.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews involve guided conversations in which only the broad topics are decided in advance. Interviewers are free to ask new questions as new insights arise in response to the answers that interviewees give. Questions tend to be 'open ended' rather than providing yes/no answers.

Key informant interviews

This is a semi-structured or structured interview with carefully selected male and female interviewees who have detailed knowledge or relevant experience of the issue under discussion.

Informal group discussions

There is no list of pre-prepared questions for clients/beneficiaries. The ‘outsider’ listens and attempts to learn about the needs or issues that are relevant to the beneficiaries. These informal discussions can take place while another activity is going on i.e. during a visit to monitor progress of another programme/activity.

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are used as a way of determining the rationale behind existing activities and patterns of behaviour within a particular community. Focus group discussions also enable participants to articulate ideas of what should change from the community’s own perspective. Discussions also help identify factors that obstruct change and ways in which change might be facilitated. Focus group discussions are one of the techniques used in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). *For more details refer to “organizing focus group discussions - some tips” in 1.4, Section 4.*

Brainstorming

When an issue or problem has been identified, everyone in a particular group is invited to give their ideas regarding possible solutions. All ideas are welcomed without criticism and recorded. Ideas are then combined and improved upon until a coherent and comprehensive list of suggestions on how to deal with the problem is drawn up.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are sent out or distributed to a range of individuals. Contrary to dealing with people face-to-face, this approach means a larger number of individuals can be reached. Questionnaires can also help produce statistical representations of opinions. The results of different answers can be correlated for each item i.e. age, sex, social position and so on. However, care needs to be taken in how questionnaires are designed (particularly how questions are worded) to avoid questions being misinterpreted.

Direct observation

An interpretation of what is observed is made by project planners and cross-checked with other methods. For example, observations can be made about the type of dwellings in a given area, with criteria such as roof type used to determine levels of poverty. Researchers can observe activities at the market place to gauge economic activities, who is selling what produce and how frequently. Government sources can later be used to cross check the perceived numbers of informal workers and market products with formal statistics.

Planning how to collect the information

Preparing a chart such as the one below is useful for planning how you are going to collect information during a gender analysis by using primary and secondary sources of data (CEDPA, 1994).

Information required	Source of information - secondary data	Means of gathering information	Source of information - primary data (ensure you include both male and female sources)	Means of gathering information	Comments, i.e. problems with method, gender concerns regarding information source etc.
How will single female-headed households collect relief	What happened in the region in the previous disaster?	Video tapes of queues, observing who is queuing - numbers of	Other relief agencies.	Discuss with logistics managers of other relief agencies what they do.	Logistics officers may not be sensitive to sizes of bags, opportunity

aid?		children with mothers. National Society reports.			costs for women and the difficulties women have had in the past.
Who normally controls family food stocks?	Reports by UN aid monitors or other humanitarian organizations.	Go to their office and collect reports.	Community Meetings. Marketplaces.	Focus group discussions with men and women. Observation of food being sold on the black market.	

CAPACITY REQUIRED TO USE DIFFERENT DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

PO	Tool	Visual	Oral	Written	Facilitation
1	Brainstorming	၇၇	၇၇၇	၇၇၇	၇၇၇
2	Community Meetings	၇	၇၇၇	၇	၇၇၇၇၇
3	Direct Observation	၇၇၇	၇၇	၇၇၇	
4	Focus Group Discussions	၇၇	၇၇၇	၇၇၇	၇၇၇၇၇
5	Historical Profile/Historical Visualisation	၇၇၇	၇၇	၇၇	၇၇၇
6	Mapping	၇၇၇	၇၇	၇	၇၇
7	Questionnaires/ Surveys	၇	၇၇၇	၇၇၇	၇၇၇
8	Ranking	၇၇	၇၇၇	၇၇	၇၇၇၇
9	Seasonal Calendar	၇၇၇	၇၇	၇	၇၇
10	Secondary Sources			၇၇၇	၇၇
11	Semi-structured Interviews		၇၇၇	၇၇၇	၇၇၇
12	Story Telling	၇			၇၇၇၇၇
13	Transect Walk	၇၇၇	၇၇	၇	၇၇
14	Venn Diagram	၇၇၇	၇၇	၇၇	၇၇၇၇၇

* Adapted from FAO (1990) "The Community's Toolbox" D'Arcy Davis Case. Available at http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/docrep/x5307e/x5307e00.htm

RANKING KEY	Visual	Oral	Written	Facilitation
	Does not require use of visual ability.	Does not require participant to speak.	Does not require that participant is able to write	No previous facilitation experience is required to use this tool
၇	Rarely relies on participant to look at and understand visual material such as video, posters or overheads.	Rarely relies on participant to listen to and provide input to discussion	Involves basic ability to read or write basic sentences.	Some previous facilitation experience is required to use this tool
၇၇	Involves the use of some visual aids and requires the participant to make some analysis of what is visually seen	Involves some discussions	Involves some ability to read or write, eg a note-taker	Basic facilitation experience is required to use this tool
၇၇၇	Relies entirely on visual observation and understanding. Requires participant to make connections between visual material presented and larger context.	Relies entirely on verbal communication and understanding. Requires participant to make connections between discussions and larger context.	Involves writing or coding eg writing down interview replies, reading a complete newspaper	Some training in facilitation is required to use this tool
၇၇၇၇				Previous facilitation experience and training on this tool are required to use this tool
၇၇၇၇၇				A high degree of experience and training are required to use this tool