

Practical Tips

for conducting gender-responsive data collection

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N.B. These practical tips are meant to be general, but gender norms are context-specific. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that he or she respects local norms while carrying out gender-responsive research*. It is advisable to seek the guidance of local contacts and of community members with whom you (or your local contacts) have a good relationship before beginning your data collection.

Preliminary research

Selecting appropriate participants for a study and asking relevant questions requires a good prior knowledge of people in places and local realities. This knowledge can be strengthened by exploring the existing literature—including published articles, grey literature, statistics, etc. about the regional context where you work—having a keen sense of observation when in the field, and carrying out in-depth interviews** with key informants*** (can be informal) when fieldwork experience in a given context is limited.

1 Establish mixed-gender field teams

Field teams should consist of both women and men. Women facilitators or interviewers frequently have better access to women study participants, and in many contexts women feel more comfortable opening up to other women than to men. Accordingly, it generally is advisable to have women interview women. Note, however, that women facilitators or interviewers and participants may come from different socio-economic, ethnic, etc. backgrounds, which can also make it difficult for them to relate to each other.

2 Collect sex-disaggregated data

To paint a holistic picture of the communities in which we work, it is important to recognize and involve the diversity of people who constitute these communities in our research. Hence, **both men and women** should participate in our studies, and data should be disaggregated by gender (collected and presented separately on men and women). This applies not only to the individual and household-level interviews, surveys and focus groups we carry out, but also to interviews with experts (local or not), village leaders, etc. Women leaders and experts

can be harder to identify—but they exist—so make sure that their perspectives are included. However care needs to be taken to insure that men's opinion doesn't influence that of women and vice versa. As a result, separate interview situations and focus groups will need to be organized for women and men.

3 Capture other forms of social difference

Since 'women' and 'men' are not homogenous categories, we have to dig deeper and examine how gender is cross-cut by many other forms of social difference: wealth status, age, ethnicity, caste, and migrant or indigenous status, among others. To ensure that we work with people from the range of social groups relevant to the topic at hand, participant selection should include members of the most salient local socio-economic categories. These categories can be identified through discussions with key informants and community members in the study area (see preliminary research, above). If participants from different socio-economic, generational, ethnic, etc. backgrounds will not speak openly in each other's presence, separate focus groups may be required, all the while maintaining emphasis on gender-segregated groups (meaning that more focus group discussions will need to be held).

* Research that is responsive to the roles, responsibilities and priorities of both men and women, and intentionally designed to reach and benefit both women and men.

** An in-depth interview is an open-ended method that allows the interviewer to explore the interviewee's perspectives on a given topic. These interviews can be carried out using structured or semi-structured interview guides or simply following a list of themes the interviewer wants to enquire about in a flexible manner. In-depth interviews can generate rich background information that can shape subsequent questions relevant to the topic.

*** Key informants are people whose social positions give them extensive, specialist knowledge about other people or processes under study, and who are therefore valuable sources of information to a researcher.

4 Seek appropriate approvals

In addition to acquiring the informed consent**** of women participants, it is sometimes required to seek a woman's husband's approval or that of a male member of her household (father, father-in-law, son, son-in-law) before interviewing her. Finding out who the relevant gatekeepers are in the household and community, and keeping men informed of the research process is important to avoid backlash against women participants. If possible men should be engaged as allies in the effort of getting the independent opinion of women in the community or household.

5 Schedule activities at convenient times

When scheduling interviews, be aware of the typically heavy demands on women's and men's time and ensure that interviews are arranged at convenient moments for your participants. This is sometimes best achieved by working with men and women while they go about their daily routine (e.g. cooking, washing dishes, etc.) so as not to deter them from their work. This can also improve the quality of the data collected since participants will not feel as rushed to get back to work.

6 Select appropriate meeting locations

Schedule interviews in convenient and appropriate places for your participants. For women, this may mean working in female spaces (e.g. kitchen, at water pump, etc.) and being aware of restrictions on women's mobility. You may otherwise find that women are unwilling to participate in your research, without necessarily knowing why.

7 Seek privacy

In many contexts, women tend to speak more, and more freely, when not in the presence of men. Gender segregated interviews or focus groups that take place in private (with no one listening in and contributing unsolicited comments) are recommended in such settings. One trick for achieving this is to carry out women's and men's focus groups or interviews simultaneously (if working with a field team), to keep men occupied while women participate in the study. Men should be reassured that researchers are not 'scheming' behind their backs when working with women. Also be aware that it can be inappropriate for a man interviewer to be alone with a woman participant (or vice versa) in a private place.

8 Use appropriate language

Make sure that facilitators, enumerators and translators communicate with women and men participants in a language in which they feel comfortable. In particular, women may not speak the national language well, if at all. Ensure that the terms you use are locally appropriate and avoid using complicated technical terms with which participants (especially women, who may not have a formal education) may not be familiar. Be attentive to non-verbal forms of communication that can reveal your participant's comfort level with respect to a given topic and the way it is presented in the discussion.

9 Manage group dynamics

When conducting focus groups, be attentive to and take note of who speaks within the group and who does not. Promote the equal participation of all participants and encourage dialogue among people with different perspectives. As noted above (point 2), if you realize that some participants will not speak openly in each other's presence you may need to readjust your groups in subsequent field exercises.

10 Feedback findings to participants

It is important to feedback your findings to both men and women participants for their verification, for improved understandings of their situation, and to give them the possibility of following up on the results should they wish to do so. After discussing results with women's and men's groups separately, it is useful to bring women's and men's groups together to exchange perspectives and learn from the findings emerging from the gender-segregated focus groups or interviews.

**** Informed consent entails giving potential research participants adequate information about what participation in a given research project involves to allow them to make a well informed decision about whether or not they wish to partake in the study. For instance, the purpose of the research must be clearly communicated to participants as well as the fact that they can opt out of the process at any point, that they are welcome to ask as many questions as they wish, and that their anonymity will be guaranteed, among other points. If participants then agree to participate in the research, their informed consent must be granted freely, without coercion, based on a clear understanding of the research process and of their role within it.

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