USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

LESSONS FOR A COST-EFFECTIVE RURAL OR POST-DISASTER HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

AN ONLINE SPEAKER'S CORNER FACILITATED BY SHOREBANK/AMPER, THE SEEP NETWORK, AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE ASSOCIATES. THE FORUM WAS HOSTED ON WWW.MICROLINKS.ORG.

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document includes all postings shared in the Speaker's Corner online discussion "Lessons for a Cost-Effective Rural or Post-Disaster Household Survey," held January 27-28, 2009 on the microLINKS Website. The original messages and related resources are available at www.microlinks.org/sc/householdsurvey. The views and opinions expressed by participants in the discussion were their own and may not necessarily reflect the views of their organizations, USAID, or The SEEP Network.

DAY ONE: SURVEY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

SPEAKER'S CORNER KICK-OFF

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Day 1: Welcome to Speaker's Corner 30

Good morning and welcome to the Speaker's Corner, sponsored by USAID and brought to you by the SEEP Network. The event is facilitated by Social Enterprise Associates, and ShoreBank International AMPER; and is part of the USAID Financial Services Implementation Grant Program (IGP), which is a competitive grant program, coordinated by USAID's Microenterprise Development office that serves as a key mechanism for supporting international and local providers of microfinance and value chain development efforts.

The Speaker's Corner will run for two days – Tuesday, 27 January and Wednesday, 28 January.

Along with more than 100 registered participants from around the world, joining us today are our Featured Presenters:

- Jesse Fripp (VP, ShoreBank International)

- Katherine Torrington (FINCA)

- Salim Jiwani (ShoreBank International project director for the AMPER survey)

- JD Crouch (ShoreBank International)

- Haoua Sienta (Ayani)

- Drew Tulchin (Social Enterprise Associates)

- Stephanie Chen (SEEP Network)

- Sunimal Alles

(Read their bios here: http://www.microlinks.org/ev.php?ID=32364_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC).

Each of our featured presenters offers unique expertise in this area, and they'll be checking in throughout the two days to provide insights and questions. However, YOUR participation is essential to making this discussion a success! Please use our featured participants as a resource, but if you have relevant experience, you're an expert, too, and we want to hear from you. If you are here to learn, don't be shy – ask questions.

Today and tomorrow, you will receive emails to your inbox – just like this one – with "posts" from participants and facilitators of the discussion. Feel free at any time to reply to an email with your own questions, answers, and thoughts. While the discussion appears in your inbox, all emailed posts will appear in the discussion board at www.microlinks.org/sc/householdsurvey. Along with other facilitators, I will focus on keeping the discussion moving and on track, and on capturing key themes.

Because this is not a "live" chat, there's no need to worry about time differences. If you're in India, you can wake up Wednesday morning and reply to a post written from Mexico the day before. We facilitators are here to make sure the conversation goes smoothly.

I will be following up this post with a "let’s start the discussion" post to get things going. Stay tuned…

WELCOME - SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH US

Post by: Salim Jiwani

Hello, we are ready to start the discussions whenever you are. Let us explore this important subject by learning and sharing.

What opinions/learnings do you have about the survey design?

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE ON SURVEY DESIGN

Post by: Sunimal Alles

There are many different methods and also systems that are used: I have used two known methods and developed one that

is more efficient than the first two:

The first method was the baseline (before provision of assistance/loans) and measure of changes after three to six months: A sample of the survey can be viewed at the following website as the 3rd tool: http://www.microcreditsummit.org/campaigns/poverty3.htm

The second was the recall method, where we meet with the householder and ask him/her what assets (Business/Personal) assets he/she has now and what he/she had three/six/twelve months ago. This format can be seen at: http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/social-and-economic-impact-of?context=user

The third method was the one we developed to entice the "hesitant and vegetating poor" to engage themselves to invest in their future. It was an engagement prior to receiving assistance/loans to attain/have better livelihoods. Once the loan term was over, we verified if the client had attained his/her aspirations before approving the subsequent loan. It is the most efficient and minimum effort and time consuming method we have developed. The poor we served were also challenged to attain aspirations and impact if they wished to have subsequent loans: It can be seen at:

http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/ccmv-assessment-and?context=user

Post by: Arsalan Kashfi

Surveys can be a powerful and useful tool for collecting data on human characteristics, attitudes, thoughts, and behavior. And, sometimes, conducting a survey is the only available option for acquiring the data necessary to answer an important research question. However, doing a survey is not the best approach for every project. Before committing to do a survey, for example, you should first consider whether or not your project team has or can obtain the appropriate background.

Conducting a thorough literature review of prior research on your topic is also an important prerequisite for conducting a survey. There are literally thousands of survey professionals and social scientists conducting and publicizing the results of surveys and studies on every conceivable topic. It is possible that your research questions have already been asked and answered by other researchers.

The goal of virtually all surveys is to enable the researcher/organization to predict accurately the characteristics or thoughts of a predefined group of people. Toward this end, it sometimes makes sense to attempt to survey the entire population of interest (for example, when this population is small, such as a company with fewer than 100 employees). However, in the great majority of cases, surveying the entire population is impractical and unnecessary. If chosen wisely, a relatively small sample or subset of a population can yield highly accurate predictions, so limited resources are best spent not by trying to survey everyone but by pursuing other goals such as obtaining a high response rate.

Professional polling organizations, for example, are now consistently able to predict how more than 100 million people will vote in national elections with a margin of error of just a few percentage points by surveying fewer than 2000 individuals! They are able to do this by employing complicated sampling techniques that ensure that their survey participants are highly representative of the U. S. voting population as a whole. For most survey projects, however, the basic technique known as simple random sampling is sufficient. The goal of simple random sampling is to, insofar as possible; ensure that every member of a chosen population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. In order to choose a sample, a list of people from which a sample can be drawn (called a sampling frame) must be found or constructed. All such lists must be carefully evaluated to ensure that they are correct and complete.

LET'S START THE DISCUSSION

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Welcome once again, and thanks for your participation in this Speaker's Corner. Our topic is "Lessons for a Cost-Effective Rural or Post-Disaster Household Survey". We expect this discussion to encompass surveys for microfinance purposes as well as for broader development and recovery efforts.

The impetus for this Speaker's Corner came from recent case study work on the Shorebank International AMPER project in the post-earthquake AJK region of Pakistan. As part of this project, Shorebank International (SBI) and its Pakistani partner, NRSP, surveyed 1,510 households in the region to gather information about livelihoods and financial needs. (Case materials are available at www.microlinks.org/sc/householdsurvey)

The AMPER survey offers many "lessons learned" and best practices - several ShoreBank staff are participating and can offer their insights.

However, we hope this conversation will be broader than the AMPER survey. Many microfinance and development organizations around the world are involved in household survey work, often under challenging conditions such as natural disasters, conflict, or even the basic challenges that working in rural, isolated environments can pose. We're excited to hear from you!

Tomorrow we're going to get into details about how to keep survey implementation cost-effective. But today, we'll focus on survey design and implementation, especially under difficult circumstances.

I'll kick us off with a few "food for thought" questions:

1. For all participants with relevant with experience: What has your organization used household surveys to achieve?

2. How can an organization effectively develop survey questionnaires that will elicit the required information from respondents?

3. What are the most important factors in personnel selection and quality control?

Post by: Andrew Tulchin

Dear Colleagues,

Many thanks for having this topic as a Speaker's Corner. I'm hopeful we'll have some good discussion. As a Facilitator for the SEEP Network for the USAID Financial Services IGP, I feel strongly that we need to learn from our collective experience to better serve our clients – especially to be able to reach the millions of low income people whom we have yet to reach with affordable financial services.

I have a (maybe philosophical question), but how many questions / how much time should such a survey be? And, do you pay people? I'm always troubled by the social scientist perspective when you demand 2 hours and 100 questions of a low income person's time. That is asking a lot. I believe in the adage: I would have made it shorter, but I didn't have enough time. Well designed surveys should be able to get at valuable data in fewer, not more, questions and in 20 minutes.

Regards,

Andrew (Drew) Tulchin

Post by: Jennifer Mandel

I agree with the concern about taking too much time from a low-income person. I think surveys should take no more than 1 hour if at all possible. Also, when I've conducted them, I've tried to set up a time in advance so that the person surveyed can identify a time that will be least disruptive of their economic activities. This doesn't always work, however. Also, while I appreciate the desire to compensate people for their time, this can be really problematic both ethically and practically. For example, people (not just in developing regions) can be inclined to tell researchers what they think we want to hear, paying them may reinforce this tendency. Instead, I've used other ways to compensate people such as feeding them during the survey or providing a small practical gift such as pens, which can be useful if their children are in school.

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Jennifer (and others)

What has been your experience with personnel selection and training? How do you bring together finding culturally appropriate people and approaches, and ensuring you have staff that is trained and knowledgeable in survey techniques?

Post by: V Vivekanandan

I agree with Jennifer about the biases in the information that come as a result of expectations of those affected by the disaster and their assumptions about the motives of those doing the survey. In particular, trying to collect information on what was lost in the disaster can be disastrous! After the tsunami, our experience was a bit like that of the greedy woodcutter who dropped his wooden axe and claimed he lost a golden axe. Every fisherman declared loss of a motor boat, making use of the fact that the Fisheries Department did not have a proper list of those with boats and those too different types of boats. So, there are certain bits of information that one can ask directly and certain bits of information that one cannot. We need other ways to collect such sensitive information. One needs to understand the values of the particular community and be able to say which can be asked and which cannot be. In the absence of pre-disaster baselines, some data cannot be collected accurately at all.

Post by: V Vivekanandan

Dear friends,

A lot depends on who is surveying and what their background is. The organisation I work with, the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) was the first off the blocks in both relief and rehabilitation after the tsunami, because: (i) we were local, (ii) our members were among those affected, (iii) we had a fairly good understanding of the affected community and the socio-cultural-political setting and (iv) we had local staff who were from the affected area and even families. It is perhaps an advantage most relief organisations do not have. So, we did not do surveys to understand the situation, but to collect some specific information that we could use to supplement our understanding of the situation and which will help us in the implementation of the project.

Before we talk about survey methodology, we need to be clear about the overall situation and context, and one needs to be clear about one's objectives.

A large quantity of data is often generated through surveys and it is often difficult to use them because we have not clarified to ourselves what we really want. So, the first thing that is required is a strong justification for a survey. Why we are doing the survey and who is going to use it?

I can share if there is interest on some of the surveys we did in a later mail.

Post by: Katie Torrington

FINCA has tackled this question by developing a five day training course for surveyors. Topics include code of conduct (including cultural awareness), interview techniques, probing question protocol, sampling challenges, as well as data cleaning, management and analysis best practice. We also structure the project so that our Research Fellows work in teams of three enabling them to help each other maintain a high standard during their 10 weeks in the field surveying clients.

Post by: Jennifer Mandel

I agree completely that starting with the objectives of the research are key. Those should drive the questions from which the methods will follow. Surveys may or may not be the most appropriate way of getting at the issues. Other factors that can complicate matters are the time and money available for the research.

As for who actually does the research, I've found using local researchers and/or university students from the area very helpful. They usually have the cultural and linguistic background to help in framing questions in the most culturally appropriate and answerable way as well as being culturally sensitive in the data collection process. However, even if they have training in the specific methods being used, I've always found it useful to conduct additional training that reviews the techniques used and connects them to the specific research project.

Post by: Deepa Rajagopalan

Dear All,

I agree, objectives are important even before starting to write up questions. We would need to define objectives precisely to ensure that we obtain accurate results. Without objectives as a beacon, questions can lack relevancy.

Also in order to limit the survey length, we would need to ask ourselves questions such as; how much detail do I want? How well will the information obtained meet my objectives? Thus, it is important to write the questions properly as well. Effective questionnaire will definitely help to pinpoint the needed information.

Best,
Deepa Raj

Jennifer (and others)

What has been your experience with personnel selection and training? How do you bring together finding culturally appropriate people and approaches, and ensuring you have staff that is trained and knowledgeable in survey techniques?

Post by: Jesse Fripp

Thanks to everyone for joining the discussion over the coming two days, and for the great insights and questions that have been put out to the community already this morning. As we get into the conversation, I would like to ask for perspectives and experience from all of you related to the SEEP Network's "Minimum Standards for Economic Recovery After Crisis." For those of you not familiar with these, they are available in a commenting draft form after a year of intensive collaborative work, and will be posted to this forum later today, I believe.

Specifically, related to this discussion, how does experience bear out, reflect, or contradict the core "minimum standards" proposed for assessment and survey work in crisis-affected environments, briefly summarized as follows:

Assessment must be ongoing in order to ensure reasonably informed decision-making in a highly fluid and sometimes volatile market environment;

Drawing from the above point, well-thought-out monitoring and evaluation systems is a critical up-front tool for program managers working to respond effectively within these complex environments;

Importance of dynamic analysis, one that captures the interdependencies of household economics, which are particularly crucial in a post-crisis environment. For example, measuring diverse income streams (formal and informal) with accuracy, measuring human capacity and human "capital," and how these factors interact to present both opportunities and challenges for households dealing with crisis;

Systemic approaches, emphasizing multi-disciplinary teams to better capture complex contextual realities of the environment, whether economic, political, social, institutional, what have you;

Relevancy to the affected communities, households and individuals is essential. Assessment and survey tools should be grounded in a clear understanding of what kinds of information are needed by whom, and how this information is used in the decision-making process. Engaging crisis-affected communities in both the information-gathering and decision-making process is key to ensuring that assessment and survey results are used effectively;

Formats must be appropriate to the immediate needs of the information users. Information should be easily exported into high-level briefs for program managers and decision-makers, broader presentation for collaborating partners, and more granular, technical reports for M&E specialists, for example;

Dissemination and communication of assessment results is key to effective and informed collaboration by a variety of stakeholders in crisis-recovery planning and execution;

Attention to ensuring a broad range of information sources is key, both existing research (as available), as well as local and international, formal and informal. Primary and secondary data sources should be mined appropriately, with an eye to balancing the need for timely crisis response with the challenges of gathering data in a crisis-affected environment;

Sensitivity to interest groups and inherent biases among the respondents. Judgment, experience, triangulation methods, and "coherency tests" can flag potential biases within data sets;

Transparency is key, including a detailed statement of assumptions and methods used in assessment and survey activity, so that a range of end-users can evaluate and utilize the data effectively.

I look forward to thoughts in response to these basic principles versus "real world" experience, and to sharing some insights from our own experience later today as well.

Post by: Haoua Sienta

Dear all,

I agree with what Vivek is saying. In fact in addition to the background of who is surveying, and the particularity of the survey topics we should keep in mind some of the following considerations. I think that values and understanding are the part of every individual and Institution. So I believe that in order to design and implement a successful household survey in rural area or even in post conflict Zone we should keep in mind the following values to guide our everyday activity:

Professional and individual development: the degree to which the community supports people to seek new knowledge and skills in the pursuit of enhancing organizational goals. The degree to which people surveyed welcome change in their community and the workplace and adapt to those ever-changing situations by keeping up-to-date skills and knowledge can be very important in data collection and liability.

Confidence and empowerment: We should respect customs and cultures in the rural area to be surveyed, have faith in the community abilities to get things done. Keep in mind that we are there for a survey, so as a facilitator or enumerator but not as a trainer; so keep an inventory of our surveyed population strengths and weakness and areas where there is need for improvement; therefore keep a positive on strengths. Empowerment in the community culture will help population to improve; utilize their talents to its fullest, which translates into greater work contribution and satisfaction.

Community responsible or leader or chief religious: In some rural area, where I had an opportunity to work, (specifically in Mali and some part of Benin; both in West Africa) you need to have a community leader to buy in (believe) in the well being of your training, survey or anything you have to do with the community in order to avoid getting biased information.

Post by: Aaron Russell

I would like to offer a few quite separate comments.

It is very true that many surveys have relatively little respect for respondents' time, and justify their actions through vague claims that the survey work will contribute to development objectives (only to have very little feedback presented to the communities from the survey).

However, I would not support the stereotype of respondents in developing countries as powerless. For a survey to succeed, timing is critical, in order to avoid times of the day when people are busy or away from the home, and to avoid times of the year when people have too much work to do. People are frequently quite good at making themselves scarce once they realize that the surveys take a long time or if they have other activities that they would rather do.

Regarding the selection of research assistants, I would certainly hire country nationals, but we should not assume that they share the cultural norms with the population being sampled. The people you hire will tend to come from the urban-raised, upper and middle classes, and they consequently bring their own prejudices and habits with them. Training in survey methods and monitored field testing of the staff as well as the tools are critical. Additionally, it helps if staff is educated on sampling methodologies as well as background literature on the topics covered. This may help you prevent many urban/elite biases from creeping into their interpretations of the answers given, and prevent laziness leading them to select houses that are less far from the road.

Post-conflict settings have their own peculiarities as well. As is in the case where I work in the (DR) Congo, de "de-capitalization" of the rural economy and destruction of infrastructure has reduced many peoples' livelihoods to subsistence, and through their interactions with government/development/conservation/humanitarian agencies since the end of the civil war, people have developed expectations of what can be gained from interacting with outsiders. In many cases these expectations are counter-productive. They expect that all outside organizations come to provide goods, and therefore will be disappointed when you do not.

Even if it is explained that no money or goods are to be distributed, people's experience with seeing prior development/humanitarian assistance monopolized by rural elites makes them skeptical of this and assume that some people are. Additionally, participation in a survey is regarded as getting one's name on a list that may lead to development assistance. Therefore, the "residents/autochtones/indigenes" may resist including (or under-represent) minorities and others who are regarded as "outsiders". In my research context, these factors result in unwillingness to participate by the younger generation and subgroups who resent the abuse of power by elites in activities that were unrelated to ours.

Community meetings in which immediate and longer-term survey objectives are discussed are helpful in addressing these issues, however a key is to assure that the invitation is received by all and that all are able and willing to voice their opinions (in some cultures women and younger men are reluctant to speak up). In order to get peoples' participation, they do need to perceive a clear benefit to them in the long run, so this is the ideal venue for illustrating how their participation is going to lead to development assistance in their communities.

Post by: V Vivekanandan

Dear friends,

I would like to add to the point made my Haoua Sienta about community leaders and the need for their buy-in. It is very important to understand the political structure of the community we are working with. In the case of traditional communities, one may have to reach out to the individual and households only through the leadership. Or at least get its blessings. Often many of us carry strong negative impressions about traditional leadership. This may be justified in some cases, but not in many others. We often take with us "politically correct" viewpoints from the NGO/Donor world that automatically classify such traditional leadership as "feudal", "undemocratic", "class based" or "gender biased". One has to be very careful and not get into a labeling game that could be counter-productive.

In India, particularly in Tamil Nadu's Hindu fishing communities, we have a strong traditional village leadership (an all male committee). Many NGOs struggled to understand them and got into conflicts with them that affected their work. In other instances, the NGOs did not understand the limitations and ended up blindly negotiating deals with the traditional leadership that did not ensure a fair and equitable relief/rehabilitation.

The leadership is also under pressure to "deliver" certain benefits for the community and this biases their responses. One has to find a way to reduce this pressure on the leadership by reaching out to the larger community and educating them. Good choices and decisions can be made by both the community at large and the leaders if only there is a clear consensus on what can be expected and what is fair. This is not easy, if the other actors (Govt, other NGOs) send wrong signals and we are the only ones fighting a battle for a fair and just relief and rehab. The competition between actors can affect all processes including household surveys.

Coordination between actors and better communication between them is vital for all activities including information collection and surveys. We did a PRA mapping of one of the tsunami affected villages and produced an excellent report. We also presented our findings to the village and got it validated. Only much later did we realize that we were the third agency to do a PRA in the same village? When asked why the village did not inform us about previous PRAs, the answer was educative: "We do not know what you are going to give us and what those other two NGOs were planning to give us. We try to cooperate with all of you and hope something will come out of it. We do not know which of you will deliver". In some villages, at the end of the first few months, the survey business had become a joke that there were a few in the village who will already give you all the answers and "guide" you on whom to talk to and whom to interview!

Post by: V Vivekanandan

Dear Friends,

It is getting close to midnight here in India. If I have been busy trading emails will most of you, it is because I wanted to share as much as I can before retiring for the night. Hope to be back in action tomorrow morning (night for many of you)!

Post by: Erik Shapiro

Hi All,

This discussion really looks to be a worthwhile and engaging experience. I look forward to learning about the conduct of surveys in development and post-disaster situations. My background is mostly in commercial market research, and I think I can provide some ideas and insights regarding two of the questions/topics [questionnaire design and staffing/quality control] that might be useful to others:

Questionnaire design:

The basic standard steps [some of them conducted simultaneously and some sequentially] are 1) discussions with the client about the goals of the survey, 2) secondary research, 3) qualitative exploration, 4) generating a rough draft of a questionnaire, 5) piloting the rough draft, 6) editing the questionnaire to result in a questionnaire that is ready to field.

The thread of questions about time limits is pertinent to the whole process. A questionnaire that is too long will cost too much in interviewer time and result in a high balk rate [respondent cuts of the interview before it is finished]. This can bias your study in a small community because word will spread about the long-winded interviewer and some people will avoid you. The artist deKoneig remarked that "the worst thing about being poor is that it takes up all of your time." People with surplus time to answer a long questionnaire might not be typical, especially in a low-income situation. Abraham Lincoln once famously said that a man's legs should be just long enough to reach the ground. Similarly with a questionnaire, different situations, populations, and budgets will influence how long a questionnaire can or should be, but less is always more. A questionnaire should be just long enough to do the job.

1) Discussions with the client- The client might be someone in your organization, or someone that hires your organization. Whichever the case, there is usually a need to reign in and channel their desires to know everything. You are their eyes and ears and noses on the ground, and they will often want reports back on how everything looks and sounds and smells. But you are working against a severe time budget in terms of questionnaire length. In discussions with the client, always guard against the error of over-promising. This stage is really an interview process unto itself. Concentrate on learning from them, rather than telling them what you might learn.

Be ready to gently challenge client assumptions. We had a client who was sure that everyone would know what "watershed" means, and assumed they could use the term in their communications. In over six hundred telephone interviews with people in the target community, only one person had even a vague idea of what "watershed" means. The most frequent definition we heard was that a watershed is a kind of toilet. This cost a lot [in terms of opportunity costs of questions left out - to learn. But if the client had gone ahead and used the term in communications, it would have cost them more. We might have been able to shoot it down in focus groups, were the client not so enamored of the concept. A smart man named Phil Hauser [my mom and dad's professor, one time deputy director of the U.S. Census, head of sociology at the University of Chicago, etc.] once told me that good scientists are always subversive. I find that one indicator that I am doing good research is when I get surprising findings. But clients often do not like surprises. Be gentle.

2) Secondary research -- This is critical for baseline information, but also might provide other insights. Most importantly, don't re-invent the wheel. If something is already known, don't waste client money and respondent time to learn it again. Secondary research usually refers to what is already known and written down. But especially for development and catastrophe situations, it might be useful to employ a survey methodology here known as a "Delphi session." Named after the mythical Greek oracle, a Delphi session involves gathering a group of experts from various disciplines and holding a sort of focus group where you can explore the situation and be informed about possible pitfalls ahead. Local experts [such as village elders] are also critical sources of information, and might be smarter and certainly more informed about the local situation than hired Ph.D's. But I would caution that including people of widely different socio-economic backgrounds in a research session might result in a stifling of conversation.

3) Qualitative exploration: Qualitative research can involve focus groups, in depth face-to-face interviews, ethnography, and other methodologies. Focus groups and face-to-face interviews tend to differ from quantitative research in that the sessions lasts longer and respondents are more likely to require or demand some sort of compensation for their time. Focus groups and in depth one-on-one interviews require what we call a "discussion guide," a less rigorous document than a questionnaire. Focus groups in the industry usually run a standard two hours and one-one-one in depth interviews can last 45 minutes and more. But the cautions about time constraints and budgeting still hold.

Focus groups work best when the respondents in any group are of a similar socio-economic background and the same gender. In commercial contexts, I have seen mixed gender focus groups fail because of the tendency of men in the group to try to flirt and impress women and- to a lesser extent - vice versa.

In MBA school, they teach that focus groups are used to generate information to create a questionnaire, especially to identify topics that might not have occurred to the imported experts. I know an economist who was conducting focus groups on food production in Afghanistan and I asked him if there was anything he learned from the focus groups that otherwise would not have been addressed in the quantitative research. He said that they had thought to ask about food that is grown and hunted, but not about food that is gathered. Were it not for the focus groups, the client would have a big gap in their knowledge about how the people get their food. This is important, but in the industry focus groups are also useful for concept testing and developing marketing programs. This should be true in development contexts as well, for example when developing a marketing program to promote a new micro-finance instrument. It can be fruitful to find out who in the group is for an idea, and who is against, and then facilitate a dialogue between the two groups. Listen carefully to how the "fors" try to sell the idea to the "againsts." This can frequently generate effective, eloquent, and appropriate marketing copy.

The general pattern for a discussion guide and a quantitative questionnaire is similar. I was trained to work from the general to the specific. Get a baseline idea of how people feel, give them some information, and ask how they feel again, and more information, and so forth. This way you don't telegraph to the respondent about what you ultimately want to learn. Something that many clients find hard to understand is that not all questions in either a qualitative or quantitative survey are there primarily because of the answers you will get from them directly. Some questions are there to prepare the respondent's mind for subsequent questions. But I caution that they are not "leading questions" as usually construed. This is a nuance too tangential for this general posting, but I'd be glad to address it later.

4) Rough drafting of questionnaire - when drafting the questionnaire, try to imagine all the ways a question might be misunderstood or misconstrued. It is probable you won't anticipate all of the problems ahead, but it is a useful exercise.

Follow the general to specific pattern, and put demographic questions - which tend to be off-putting - at the end. Array demographic questions from least [how many kids, for example] to most [age, income] off-putting. If face-to-face, instruct interviewers to record gender from observation. Include time codes on each page of questionnaire, especially for use in piloting [below]. This would require writing down what time the interview starts and when each page is finished.

5) Piloting - You need to conduct ten to twenty interviews to test the questionnaire and identify problems. Do these with respondents from the same population as you will be studying. If it is a small community, pilot in a different but comparable community so as not to "burn your list" [use up eligible respondents] and so word about your work does not spread too fast in the sampled population, which could bias your findings. If piloting in the same community, make sure the same respondents are not included in the final survey. Those who have been interviewed qualitatively should also be excluded from the quantitative phase. You might have to go through several piloting/drafting cycles before a questionnaire can be finalized. Interview your interviewers to learn about issues they might notice that could influence the quality of the findings.

6) Final draft - Review the piloted questionnaires to see which questions are useful and which can or should be discarded of modified. A useful exercise is to ask yourself, "what will I do with a thousand [or whatever n] answers to this question. Use the time codes to learn how much you are paying - so to speak - for different questions. Slash and burn. You might need to discard a favorite question of yours or the client's, even if it works, simply because another question is more important.

Finally, no questionnaire draft should really be considered final until all the bugs are worked out. Tally the first fifty or hundred or so that come in and see where you can further modify and, if necessary, slash and burn. Be careful, however, in tallying questionnaires with large differences together. A fixed typo should not be too much of a problem, but dropping a question could change how respondents answer subsequent questions. It might be necessary, if a big change is made, to toss out the first hundred and start over.

I have to run off to some meetings now, but I wanted to get my two hundred cents in first. Sorry about the length of this posting. It was Mark Twain who wrote, in a letter to a friend, that the letter would have been shorter if he had more time to write it. I very much look forward to reading the postings and learn more from you all when I get back on line, and I'll post something from my experience about staffing and quality control then too.

Post by: Haoua Sienta

Dear Participants,

I agree with Jennifer that hiring local researcher could be very useful in some case. But sometimes according to the topics and the relationships between the local interviewer and the institution surveyed it's good to have a second eye supervising the whole survey.

As for the length of the survey, the shorter it is the best chances we have to keep or sample populations focused and collect efficient data.

In my experiences it appears that when surveying people in rural areas, especially women of MFI's in developing countries the day and time of the survey can be very important as is giving up incentives to participate in the survey.

In fact in some villages there is only one market day for the whole week so for a sampling representativeness you might want to know that market day in advance before setting up your survey day and time.

Post by: Haoua Sienta

Dear all,

Regarding Andrew's question on should we pay low income people we surveyed, I have a dilemma about it.

In one hand I think it might be more correct to pay those people when asked to stay with us and answered to our questions for hours instead of doing their regular business, commerce, farming fishing or …

In the other hand, my worry is that by paying money can we assure that participant are really interested in the survey topic or just do it for money? That's why I will be thinking of giving up small incentives but not money.

Now I have a question to all participants. Sometimes in the survey it appears that principal participants have no or low education level. In that case scenarios how elaborate the survey questions to be more comprehensible to them? Is it ok to use short sketch or history adapted in the context of the survey and then ask them to personalize it to they own situation or what will be the best way to proceed?

SETTING RESEARCH GOALS FIRST

Post by: Jessica Shortall

This seems to be a topic several participants are interested in. If you have experience in survey design and implementation, could you reply to this post and give us some real-world examples?

- What the research / survey project was for (and where)

- How you established goals

- What those goals were

- Lessons learned in this process

Post by: V Vivekanandan

Dear Jessica,

As mentioned in another mail just now, we did a number of surveys. However, I shall try to answer your questions with regard to one survey we did of all households in the villages where we were given the responsibilities to undertake permanent shelter construction as part of the public-private partnership that was set up by the Tamil Nadu Government after the tsunami.

What the survey project was for?

It was to have baseline information on the damages to houses and the affected families so that we can plan our intervention better.

How you established goals?

We were lucky to receive inputs from some individuals who worked in the Gujarat earthquake earlier. Our architect for the project had worked in two previous disasters. So, we had an internal brainstorming on setting the goals for the survey. Our team also talked informally with the local community to understand their expectations and hopes. This was also taken into account while setting the goals for the survey. It took about two to three weeks to do this.

Goals set for the survey

1. Understanding the kind of houses people had before the tsunami--size, materials, layout
2. Use of the spaces inside and outside the house by purpose/activity as well as by gender and age
3. Understanding the needs of the individuals of the household from a space use point of view
4. Classifying socio-economic status of the household
5. Assessing whether house needed replacement or could be repaired or rebuilt
6. Willingness to use toilet (area had low toilet use before disaster)
7. Obtaining the demographic data about the household for future reference and for developing house plans
8. Assessing willingness of household to move to relocation site
9. Willingness to take part in construction and construction related activities

Lessons learned in the process

1. The full data we had collected for all households ensured that nobody could come up with new claims later on. Many other NGOs struggled with communities and individuals making new claims at later stage that could not be verified. They just depended on Government lists which had limitations. Since we had accurate data, the Government also went by our list rather than by its own.

2. It was also a good way to establish rapport with all the households in the village and develop the confidence in being able to sort out issues without referring all issues to the village leadership which had its own biases.

3. Not all information collected was useful or used. Many of the desires and wishes recorded did not help us beyond a point and we had to have a different process of negotiation to decide on many things.

4. The data base still lies with us in files that is useful and referred to when issues come up with respect to particular households. However, nobody really had the energy or interest left to put all the information together and come up with a useful compilation.

Post by: Jodi Fischer

Thank you to everyone who has shared information, experiences, and contributed to the dialogue. I have a question regarding the role of youth in household surveys. I assume different organizations are held to different standards in terms of how and what information can be gathered from youth. I know that for research to be permitted publication, in the U.S. we are held to the rules and regulations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which is a committee designated to review, monitor and approve research with the intent to protect the rights and welfare of the individuals involved. In the course of my survey experience, when children or youth are included in or the sole subject of interest, I have found that there are cultural norms that dictate the best way to accumulate data that are counter to the restrictions placed by the IRB. Do issues like this ever factor into the design and implementation of household surveys in your experience and if so, do you have any suggestions, tips, or best practices that address the inclusion of youth input and livelihood measurements?

IMPLEMENTATION AFTER DISASTERS, CONFLICTS, OTHER CHALLENGING SETTINGS

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Thanks again for all of your insightful comments. While the topics of personnel, setting goals, and lessons learned carry on, I wanted to start a new thread related to the special circumstances that disasters, conflicts, and other disruptions can pose to survey projects.

Some of this has been touched on already, as when Vivek mentioned that NGOs in post-tsunami Tamil Nadu struggled with individuals making false claims. We would love to hear more input and experiences from those of you who have "been there".

- What is your direct experience with post-disaster, post-conflict, or other challenging survey work?

- What are the special needs of individuals and communities in these challenging situations?

- What were the most unexpected challenges you encountered in survey design & implementation?

- What advice would you give to others doing survey work in similarly difficult settings?

For example, Shorebank International, through its AMPER project in post-earthquake Pakistan, found that working with a local partner was essential to ensuring smooth logistics, communication, and safety in a challenging and unpredictable environment. They also found that preparing "back up" lists of randomly selected homes and areas was important, because many areas and homes were destroyed. They also found that rapid lines of communication and feedback were vital - in an unpredictable situation, field staff needed to be able to communicate challenges and questions quickly, and get responses quickly so they could adjust.

What are your experiences?

Post by: Linda Jones

Hi,

My experience from conducting 'market research' at the household level in Afghanistan combines elements of conflict/post-conflict environment with a challenging socio-cultural context (gender segregation, clan and tribal divisions) - not to mention language barriers. I have conducted research for MEDA and Zardozi (a local NGO) in Afghanistan over the past five years.

In one sense, conducting surveys in IDP camps was easier because there is a defined area with government/multilateral information on households. But, understanding 'what is really going on' is always trickier. This is very much complicated when targeting villages, and accessing households within villages. It's difficult to know sometimes if one is being 'steered' to certain villages and households within villages. That is why it is so important to have a trusted local partner who understands and supports the mission in a proven way.

Finding the right partners up front is always critical to me - for both research and implementation - I look at the history of the organization on paper, the attitudes of people towards them when we meet, how easily doors are opened and by whom, how they treat people etc., a kind of pre-survey survey of who will be committed, reliable, connected and competent! This can be even more difficult in a conflict / post-conflict situation where those with capacity may be fewer and further between, and relationships may be fractured due to underlying tensions.

Language is of course an issue in market research and surveys - especially where multiple languages may exist in close proximity requiring different translators / surveyors. This is where there is a lot of room for error. Again, having a good partner to hash through the meaning and aim of each question is so important. It can be time-consuming, but ultimately way more cost-effective than a survey that doesn't get the needed information.

Thanks for the interesting discussion!

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Dear All,

Responding to Jessica's questions from my experience:

*What is your direct experience with post-disaster, post-conflict, or other challenging survey work?
We need to separate the post-disaster and post-conflict into two periods: Short term: up to six months and Long term: More than six months. Different survey formats were developed to gather data and measure impact.

*What are the special needs of individuals and communities in these challenging situations?
In the short term, if the areas affected/people were economically ACTIVE the surveys for program design indicated that the displaced/returnees needed: 1) Security 2) Non food items 3) restart of schools and health centers 4) housing and roofing materials 5) Repair of access roads to start marketing goods and purchase of goods 6) Money or loans to restart economic activities and 7) Food until economic activities restarted/agriculture harvests were made 8) Transport to get back home.

If the displacement was for more than six months, and if there was no access to regular schooling, vocational training and people were not allowed to work in host countries, we found that it was faster to get people to start activities related to ventures to generate revenue by providing a package of services: 1) De-traumatization 2) Talents/strengths identification and orientation towards professions and trades 3) Starting of S&I (Savings and Investment) groups and establishing Producer organizations/cooperatives, 4) registering the organizations, opening accounts in banks or MFIs, depositing funds and access to larger loans for economic and agriculture related activities.

In addition to the above, we found that the economically INACTIVE, vulnerable and HIV+ persons, OVCs (Orphans and vulnerable children) and those who lived in RRA (Remote Rural Areas) were vegetating rather than believing that they had a way out of their misery. We carried out mind and community mapping sessions to visualize the manner they could live better lives and provided them guidance to establish organizations.

The MFR (MicroFinance for Rehabilitation) programs we developed in DR Congo, provided loans through existing MFIs for schooling and university students through the Rotaract club, rent until they reconstructed houses, construction loans and loans for restarting clinics and economic activities.

What were the most unexpected challenges you encountered in survey design & implementation?
The most unexpected challenge was not being able to measure significant change related to living conditions among the very poor as they did not know where to start moving forward. We designed the "pre assistance engagement to attain aspirations/impact" to overcome this. Please see the engagement at: http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/ccmv-assessment-and?context=user

*What advice would you give to others doing survey work in similarly difficult settings?
The economically poor, marginalized, destitute and displaced need to have a catalyst to move forward. We found that it was surprising to see those who needed most to move forward were not doing so due to man-made reasons; following past leaders and not being able to realize that they had talents/strengths that could be developed and marketed. When carrying out surveys, everyone should insert an overall "happiness level" rating of between 100% to 0%; document what was preventing them becoming happier to assist program designers to develop sessions to sensitize, challenge and engage those who do not move forward to do so. We also found that people in post disaster needed to have democratically elected and innovative leaders that were ready to be transparently accountable to move them forward, we hope to design a survey format to capture this need and assist sensitizers.

Post by: Jennifer Mandel

I did the exact same thing recently in Pakistan. The other technique I often use during training is to have the researchers "back translate" the translation. In other words, I give them only the Urdu version and go through each question asking them to tell me what it means in English. This way we can discuss nuanced differences in meaning among various words. The team then also has a chance to discuss how they will translate the Urdu into local dialects so that we arrive at a consensus view of the appropriate translation.

Post by: Erik Shapiro

ON TRANSLATION:

That's a great point about back translation, especially if the survey planners are not fluent in the target language.

It is also important to understand that a concept in one culture might not be the same as the same concept in another culture, even if correctly translated. For example, we did a national survey on how consumers feel by telephone in P.R. China to parallel one we had done monthly in the U.S. for many years. The Chinese findings on family income seemed too high. Interviewing Chinese colleagues [mostly my wife, Longjuan] we learned that when a Chinese person thinks of their family, they tend to include all of the people they can rely on and who can rely on them in times of trouble. In the U.S., on the other hand, people tend to think of their family as those people living under the same roof who pool resources. Knowing this, we could modify the questions on the Chinese questionnaire to make them more comparable to the U.S. findings. This also fixed comparability problems in other family-related questions, such as "Has anyone in your family lost a job or experienced reduced hours in the past twelve months?"

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi everyone,

We definitely have to have flexible long-term implementation plans when working in post conflict/disaster areas. However, we have developed work plans with partners/communities taking into account the reality and have used it to challenge them to strive to attain the activities within the established time frames, by putting in place a manner they will have access to a reward. (i.e. access to grants/loans matched to savings, if and when they have a targeted amount, recorded and internally audited transparent accounts/democratically elected board members/bank account opened etc.)

The main bottlenecks/hesitance, we have found in communities living in post conflict has been their holding on to past hurts, inability to trust each other to pool resources to establish structures and systems to move forward, and/or due to lack of talented and honest leaders to provide vision. We have overcome this by creatively visualizing the manner all communities would have sufficient money to live better lives and establishing time bound, task oriented, clear work and business plans, and by focusing on making money rather than vegetating on their past and remaining miserable. In certain communities when we found heavy resistance, (especially where tribal or religious affiliations had been the cause of conflict) we designed sensitization sessions to catalyze the process through community mapping and visualizing techniques where we demonstrated and injected the thoughts and actions needed to live better lives by focusing on the principle that "Everyone needs everyone else (including enemies) for communities and businesses to thrive," (i.e. some were honest and transparent leaders, some good skilled workers/supervisors/managers, some good accounts/record keepers, some good "policepersons"/auditors, some good transporters, some good salespersons and EVERYBODY were CLIENTS for goods and services). When we had completed the sessions, and there were still some hesitance/challenges that delayed the process, we carried out surveys to verify happiness levels and the manner they could overcome them through the talents/strengths of their own community members. Eventually, we suggested that they should consider establishing centres/committees for better living, to bring together citizens concerned and knowledgeable of specific challenges to resolve them (i.e. establishing processes for conflict resolution-as it was better to be in harmony for businesses to thrive, and setting up early warning systems to prevent the resurgence of tribal/ethnic conflict in the future). The package of services we offered through ACBL (Advisory Centres for Better Living) in DR Congo can be viewed at:

http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/advisory-centres-for-better?context=user

The rationale here is that the economically poor do not like/wish to remain poor and destitute if they can see a way out. They can be visualized to realize that they have a way out by using community maps/aspirations and talents/strengths by using surveys for different purposes (i.e. Animated happiness level survey – 100% -75% - 50% - 25% or below 25%, which brings out the reality, survey of the list of issues if resolved that will increase happiness levels, a survey of who is willing, able and available at the village level to resolve the issues and establishing an activity plan to achieve them)

Post by: Stephanie Chen

Dear all,

Today's discussion has been a great start! I have very much enjoyed reading and learning about your different experiences with the development, implementation, and challenges in various survey projects.

I wanted to follow-up on Jessica's and Linda's points about the specific issues and challenges you face when operating in a post-disaster/conflict environment, particularly the need for flexibility in your work plans. Having heard many challenges that one can face in the field, whether it is related to weather or infrastructure (i.e. bad roads), language barriers, cultural sensitivities, or staff turnover:

- how have you managed the delicate balance between operating in a changing environment with the various deadlines and timeframes from your partners, donors, and even pressures within your own organizations?

- how have you developed contingency plans that account for expected and unexpected challenges?

- have you been successful in planning for the unexpected, or is it more about flexibility and good communication?

I look forward to hearing more about your experiences and insights. Thanks for everyone's engagement and participation so far!

Post by: Jennifer Mandel

I'd like to pick up on the issue of survey language. My experience with market research in two non-post conflict settings has shown me the importance of having colloquial translations of survey questions. In the Philippines we translated into Filipino only to find that most people don't speak formal Filipino, but rather a colloquial version that incorporates English and Spanish. In fact, people didn't even understand some of the translated words at all, but totally understood the English! In another context, working in Pakistan, where many different languages were spoken, we found it easier to translate to Urdu, but then to work through point by point the meaning of each question and the information we wanted to obtain with our fieldworkers. Hopefully, this reduced any problems.

Post by: Salim Jiwani

Dear Jennifer,

Thanks for sharing your experience.

We drafted our survey questionnaire in English. After agreement of all the stakeholders, we translated it into Urdu as this is widely spoken and understood in the area where we are working. We then hired a team of local staff and trained them in the survey questions. This really helped us a lot because there were some technical terms in Urdu that had to be translated into the local dialect to extract the right answers from the respondent.

Salim Jiwani

Post by: Charlie Olson

Dear All,

While conducting surveys in Brazil and Mozambique, the balance came down to 1) relying on what local microfinance leaders determined to be feasible, and 2) sticking with somebody who was well acquainted with the region. Often we would arrive with a plan of what we needed to accomplish, then separated out the desirable from the essential, negotiating to ensure the mission would stay intact and the deliverables provided on time.

Recently traveling in a region of southern Africa that has historically been devastated by civil war, my survey team relied heavily on local microfinance professionals who had grown up amidst the conflict, and understood where foreigners could safely visit to avoid crime and natural obstacles such as closed roads. With this support, we were able to complete our assignment ahead of schedule, even though the logistics were not exactly as we had envisioned when we left the US.

Post by: Linda Jones

Hi Charlie (et al),

Good comments - that type of very specific knowledge about which road you can go on, and which village you can venture to, provided by a local person is essential in conflict areas. In some ways it seems far away from 'how to do a good survey' but in these situations the logistics are equally critical.

LOGISTICS IN THE FIELD

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Dear all,

Thanks so much for your active participation and intelligent insights. I'm working on compiling themes and lessons from today, of which there are many.

We had a bit of a lull (lunchtime in the Americas), so I wanted to pick things up with specific questions about logistics in the field.

- How can you ensure clear and rapid communication from field teams to supervisors?

- What configurations and arrangements have and have not worked for you in terms of deploying surveyors into the field?

- What functions can local partners play in logistics?

Thanks and looking forward to the rest of the day!

Post by: Aaron Dibner-Dunlap

Hi all,

Thank you for everyone's input so far. I must admit I got a somewhat late start in the discussion, but I'm catching up bit by bit.

My question stems from sacrifices we had to make during survey design regarding household sampling. As you know, effective random sampling is a crucial aspect of the generalizability of any survey data. Conducting a survey in a 30 square km swath of rural Senegal, we were fortunate enough to have a catalog of potential households from which we drew a 10% purely random sample. However, this drawing gave us some households in far-flung villages, access to which would have significantly affected the implementation period and budget. We compromised by grouping several of these hard-to-access households into slightly larger groups in nearby villages. Fortunately, the resultant cluster effect seemed relatively small.

How have you mitigated the challenges of sample design in rural settings to minimize survey costs while maintaining its effectiveness? Additionally, how do these challenges differ in post-conflict settings, where access can be even more costly? Finally, what are your assessments of the losses to survey quality when using a non-randomly sampled population?

Thanks in advance for your insights.

Post by: Salim Jiwani

Dear Aaron,

In the survey that we did, we also faced similar issues on sampling. We did use the random sampling methodology, and had a few households that were scattered. We brought these household though the community networks organizations of NRSP - our project partner at one place and conducted the survey interviews. This saved a lot of time for the survey team and savings in cost.

We would also suggest that we should always go for random sampling, wherever, possible so that samples are representative of a larger population.

Post by: Linda Jones

Hi Aaron,

Have you considered representative as opposed to random sampling? In enterprise development, I prefer the former in any case, and it can mean reduced numbers and a lower budget.

Post by: Deepa Rajagopalan

Hi Linda,

Isn't representative sampling hard to accomplish, as researchers may dedicate a great deal of time and funding to getting the most representative sample possible?

Appreciate your insight.

Post by: Linda Jones

Hi Deepa,

First maybe a clarification of terms - when I say representative sampling, others might use the term purposeful or judgement sampling. This may be different to what you are thinking when you use the term.

Random sampling - in order to be representative - depends on a large number of respondents - and that would be very costly in terms of conducting the survey. Often there is population data available so it is not necessarily complicated to set up.

Purposeful sampling means that someone with knowledge of the area can help researchers target representative households. There is more time upfront in the selection process, which ties into program targets and goals, but the numbers of households surveyed can be many fewer. This is especially useful for livelihoods work where there may be a target population or income generation activity. You can have stratified purposeful sampling like you can have stratified random sampling.

That is the type of survey that I was referring to.

WRAP-UP FROM DAY 1

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Hello again and thanks for a great Day One! I will take a break from facilitation at 7 pm US Eastern time tonight, and pick back up at 9 am US Eastern time tomorrow.

Tomorrow we will turn to discussing Cost-effective Survey Implementation.

For tomorrow: For those of you in the Eastern Hemisphere, please feel free to get going on the Day Two topic when you log on in the morning. I'll send a post in a moment that you can reply to, to get the ball rolling.

To recap the discussion today:

We heard from a range of organizations, including Shorebank, Ayani, FINCA, South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies, and more. And we have gotten perspectives from (DR) Congo, Tamil Nadu, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Brazil, Mozambique, and the Philippines, Senegal.

We discussed the following main topics:

1. Payment for survey respondents

2. Personnel selection and training

3. Preparation for survey design

4. Questionnaire development

5. Use of local partners

6. Challenges of post-disaster and post-conflict surveying

7. Steps to take after the survey is over

8. Sampling

Interesting themes emerged throughout the day:

1. Development saturation can have many unintended effects on surveying, including

a. Bias of respondents

b. Pressure on community leaders to "deliver" some of the aid bounty being given out

c. False reporting of assets in order to secure "replacement" assets

2. Goal-setting before survey development is key – to know why we are asking what we're asking

3. Local connections – partners, translators (especially into dialects), test groups, and local leaders

a. "Local" staff does not always mean they are familiar with the local culture in a poor area. "Locals" who are educated urban elites will still require training.

4. Not all information you need can be gotten by asking direct questions

5. Challenges of random sampling – one participant gave example of a survey in rural Senegal in which the randomly selected households were "far flung" and posed significant cost challenges

…and some "quotable quotes":

1. "Slash and burn! For each question on your list, ask yourself, 'What will I do with 1,000 (or n) answers to this question?'"

2. "(After the survey) nobody really had the energy or interest left to pull all the information together and come up with a useful compilation"

3. "The balance came down to 1) relying on what local microfinance leaders determined to be feasible, and 2) sticking with someone who was well acquainted with the region."

Thanks again and we look forward to "seeing" you tomorrow!

Post by: Nicholas Molodyko

Dear Jessica and colleagues,

We at ShoreBank International Ltd. (SBI) commend you on your efforts thus far. Day 1 has been terrific, specifically in terms of knowledge transfer and learnings. And in bringing together a community (far and wide) of practitioners in a niche but very important area of activity in development finance.

Post by: Haoua Sienta

Dear All,
It's late here in Mali. I enjoyed exchanging with you and reading the experiences of most of you.

DAY TWO: COST-EFFECTIVE SURVEYS

COST-EFFECTIVE SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Good morning (wherever you are) and welcome to Day Two of the Speaker's Corner on "Lessons for a Cost-Effective Rural or Post-Disaster Household Survey".

We had a great first day, discussing general themes and lessons learned in survey development and implementation. Please visit www.microlinks.org/sc/householdsurvey for the full list of posts. Please also see my post, titled "End of Day 1: Summary" for a recap of the first day's discussions. It's available at http://www.microlinks.org/ev.php?ID=33312_201&ID2=DO_DISCUSSIONPOST_LIST.

In order to get our friends in the Eastern Hemisphere off to a running start, I'll pose a few early questions:

1. What steps can be taken before questionnaire development and implementation, to ensure a cost-effective process?

2. What are the key considerations in budgeting for survey implementation?

Thanks and see you in the (US) morning!

Post by: V Vivekanandan

Wow! That was a master class in developing a survey. It contains many tips to avoid the usual pitfalls. Thanks.

Post by: V Vivekanandan

Dear friends,

Payments should be avoided for surveys. This spoils the market for others. In the kind of situation we found ourselves after the tsunami, time was not a problem for the first six months when the livelihoods had not resumed.

However, when normal life is resumed, time will be a problem. The only way to manage this is to reduce questionnaire size and select interview timings to suit the respondents.

Post by: Getaneh Gobezie

Dear Colleagues,

I thank all the participants.

From my field experience in microfinance/microenterprise, I believe that surveys need to be planned and conducted very carefully. The most important thing is that they involve interaction of an 'expert' with the local people (clients in our case). So, designing the survey questions require that the questions are appropriate (with relevant questions), not time consuming, and (perhaps more importantly) we have the 'right' kind of people to manage the survey. Most of our survey questions are such that: they are designed by 'experts' who think they know the 'reality' of the poor; they take too much time for interview; and are conducted by people from urban areas with little or no awareness about the culture in the localities.

I think most of us in the field nowadays tend to use focus group discussions in market researches to gather relevant information from clients. Important tools to support this are being developed by such organizations as MicroSave, and are proving to be useful. The design of the questions is brief, with only some 'guides' to initiate discussions, thus leaving much room for the people to be interviewed to say their views. Right kinds of people are very important to guide (facilitate, or moderate) the discussion -- people who know the local culture, norm, etc, and who treat people (and very poor people) with respect. The timing, I believe, should not extend beyond 1 hour - 1 and half hour.

Very long questionnaire, poorly designed surveys are less relevant and useful in this field. In this regard, I would like bring in a quote (a long quote) from Robert Chambers (of IDS/UK) who is one of the leaders in PRA/RRA, from his sayings back in 1981:

"....The solutions [to information gathering] preferred by many well-trained professionals are longer and more costly. Social anthropologists perpetuate their ritual immersions in alien cultures; sociologists! and agricultural economists plan and perpetuate huge questionnaire surveys; and scientists map soils, vegetations, land use and rainfall. All have their uses but most of them do not generate much information in their early stages. Some are academically excellent but useless: the social anthropologist's fieldwork published ten years later; the detailed soil map which sits on the shelf; the social survey which asked questions which were 'interesting' but of no use to a planner. Others are never processed: the extensive questionnaire survey with the 30 pages of questionnaire (multi-disciplinary, each discipline with its questions), which if asked are never coded, or if coded never punched, or if punched never processed, or if processed and printed out, never examined, or if examined, never analyzed or written up, or if analyzed and written up, never read, or if read, never understood or remembered, or if understood or remembered, never actually used to change actions. Rural surveys must be one of the most inefficient industries in the world..! Benchmark surveys are often criticized, and yet these huge operations persist, often in the name of the science of evaluation, pre-empting scarce national research resources, and generating mounds of data and papers which are likely to be an embarrassment to all until white ants or paper-shredders clean things up. ..." Chambers, Robert (1981): Rapid Rural Appraisal: Rationale and Repertoire, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT, Vol. 1, 95-106.

I look forward to hearing and learning from you.

Post by: Erik Shapiro

ON MINIMUM STANDARDS

I think these standards are well-thought out and reasonable. I would suggest one addition. Don't multi-task.

A survey is a tool that can be used for numerous legitimate purposes, one of which is scientific research. But it can bias the research if the survey is also intended for some other use, such as to find out what individuals lost so they can be compensated or to recruit them for a program. It is fine to use a survey instrument for such purposes, but keep it separate from research intended to generate findings that are projectable to a larger population. [Although it is legitimate for non-research survey findings to be used as secondary sources of information for research.]

A questionnaire designed to recruit people to a program or gather information about individual losses would be designed differently from one for research. All can be fine surveys, but they should be separate and different.

Not so fine, and something I am sure no one reading this would ever dream of doing, is a sales pitch disguised as a survey. These are employed widely in the U.S. and consist of a phone call and someone asking if they can do a survey on, say, water quality. After three or four perfunctory questions, the "respondent" is asked when they can schedule a home visit to give an estimate for a household water filter. "Push polls" - designed to promote certain points of view, usually regarding some up-coming election - are similarly illegitimate.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi Jessica,

To respond to your question:

What has been your experience with personnel selection and training? How do you bring together finding culturally appropriate people and approaches, and ensuring you have staff that is trained and knowledgeable in survey techniques?

My experience has been that it was more efficient to use a mix of staff (Minimum of two) from different backgrounds (speaking different languages, from different areas, different social levels, qualified vs. experienced) to have a balance and also prevent staff who think the same way not analyzing the responses for authenticity/validity before documentation. The training we carried out was in the following sequence: outlining the purpose/goal and approach of the surveys in an office based setting, designing a format for data collection, testing the format with a sample of clients, review of format and updating, carrying out the survey in the field with all staff, breaking up into groups (of minimum two) if survey was to be carried out among a large number of beneficiaries, daily reviewing of data collected and creating a database, re-collecting data on unclear/erroneous areas, finalizing the data base/MIS.

When we had to carry out large surveys, we advertised that there would be a training program to select enumerators, short-listed applicants (Double the number needed), carried out the first stages of the sequence as office and field based training, tested and selected the first 50% who were the most appropriate and passed the test.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Dear All,

To respond to the basic principles, I have numbered the different topics presented in order to be accurate:

1) Yes: assessments should be ongoing and be able to be accurate, in order to make decisions. We accomplished this in DR Congo by establishing an "engagement to attain goals/aspirations prior to receiving assistance" system/format which was updated at every loan cycle to measure investments, document services needed and impact. The format is readable at: http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/ccmv-assessment-and?context=user

2) Agreed: The above format also served as a monitoring and evaluating system that in reality challenged staff and partners to be accurate in documenting results and impact while carrying out interviews and field visits, as they had to approve the subsequent loans.

3) Agreed: The first part of the above format addresses part of this basic principle.

4) Agreed: we used teams of a minimum of two persons from different backgrounds.

5) Agreed: All our surveys were for affected communities and at times control groups within the communities that did not receive assistance/loans. The information gathered helped us to develop more focused and appropriate services to enable clients to attain impact, and also to report to management and also donors. The first surveys to design the MFR (MicroFinance for Rehabilitation) program were carried out in refugee and displaced camps in Rwanda and Bukavu by total participation of the affected communities. Once they returned to their homes, we provided the services requested, reviewed progress and added services needed through ACBL (Advisory Centers for Better Living). Please see the services we offered at: http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/advisory-centres-for-better?context=user

6) Agreed: formats must be able to collect data rapidly and with minimum error. The formats we designed were all user-friendly and rapidly enterable into excel sheets for analysis and reporting. We also used a minimum of two persons to carry out the surveys. They were also able to analyze assets and assign values more accurately than if one person did it.

7) Agreed: whenever possible, it is necessary to disseminate information collected in order to prevent duplication of efforts and prevent dependency and fraud (beneficiaries receiving assistance/loans from two or more sources), especially as credit bureaus are rarely functional in post conflict/disaster areas.

8) Agreed: All primary and secondary data needed for immediate program design and response and future expansions and reporting should be collected at the same time, in order to reduce costs. The formats for new surveys should be designed after careful study of lessons learned during past surveys in similar settings. NOTE: I have observed that this is not adhered to often, increasing the number of errors during data collection.

9) True: it is essential that those who collect data are from different backgrounds/areas to minimize biases. Sometimes using interpreters assist in refining data obtained before documentation, due to the need to ask questions repeatedly.

10) True: Transparency and also daily review of data collected by the partners, those affected, staff team and supervisors is essential in ensuring accuracy and rapid correction if needed to formats.

Post by: Salim Jiwani

Dear Getaneh,

I agree to the points mentioned in the first paragraph of your experience. This is what we also did in our project - AMPER without involving the "experts" but involving the local people and local organization.

This seems that what we did to achieve our objectives on the survey has been validated by your similar experience.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi All,

We recently carried out surveys among displaced persons in Northern Uganda to verify willingness to set up S&I (Savings and Investment Groups) Groups, form Producer organizations/cooperatives and live better lives. The survey was also to develop the strategy and methodology for interventions. We had excellent participation as we designed the survey format and carried out pre-survey exposures in such a way as to creatively visualize that their aspirations to live better lives could become reality if they actively participated, provided accurate information and carried out what they themselves wished.

As these groups had been accustomed to "Hand Outs" of food for participating in the past, (And we needed to change the mindset) they were informed that all those who participate in setting up the S&I groups at the next meeting, would receive a small sum for transport but that they needed to save 50% of it in their new groups and give it to a member f! or investing in an economic venture. Again we had excellent participation of community members and also launched the S&I groups.

As the savings were theirs, we informed them that they should only elect 100% honest people to manage their groups and POs and account for their savings. We then carried out a survey to measure their current happiness levels and what would make them live better lives. Many challenges were brought forward and we suggested that they establish "Committees for better living", comprised of concerned citizens who were interested in resolving the challenges. One challenge that surfaced was their suspicions of past leaders and therefore unwillingness/hesitance to save. We informed them to replace their past leaders with 100% honest, talented and innovative persons concerned about their future, as "past leaders" had not been able to prevent conflict and bring back normalcy rapidly.

We found during the surveys that communities in post conflict and displacement had very few members who can read and write, we sensitized them to realize what could happen to their money, if they were not able to audit accounts, and challenged them to rapidly learn from those who can read and write in their community, to be able to move forward (save, invest and establish their organizations) rather than wait for literacy programs to come to them.

Therefore my advice to all that plan surveys for developing, expanding or collect data is to visualize the outcomes and also have probing questions to enable communities to think and act in a manner that they will challenge themselves to move forward.

We used interpreters wherever necessary to complete the surveys.

Post by: Haoua Sienta

Good Day all,

I think some of the steps to be taken before questionnaire development and implementation to ensure a cost effective process are:

• Have a clear definition of the survey objective, which will help us to properly choose the survey questions knowing the amount of uncertainty the survey will reduce and the cost of asking wrong question or making wrong decision, so be clear about the information we need to collect.

• Define our Audience: It is very important to elaborate our questions in accordance to who is going to respond to the survey; your target population sample.

• Produce a good schedule listing in detail the task that are to be done for the survey with an responsible assigned to each task to avoid delay which can incur additional cost.

• Budge: Properly manage the cost of creating instrument, the cost of data entry and analysis in order to make sure we won't exceed our budget.

Post by: Jennifer Mandel

Although I haven't used this technique myself, I heard a presentation by someone at CAMFED who had used it for an evaluation of their program in various East and Southern African countries. They used PDAs for the survey collection. They were able to have several different surveys for various stakeholders and in a variety of languages on the PDA. The data were collected and downloaded daily and then were checked by team leaders daily. This ensured quality data collection because any problems could be resolved immediately. Also, it saved a lot of money in the data entry, cleaning and verification process. The upfront investment would be large, but if surveys are a tool used regularly by an organization this might be a tool worth investigating.

Post by: Kristi Rice

I work with an MFI in Burundi, and a couple years ago we were trying to do a low-cost impact study. We created a short (20 min) questionnaire (primarily using the template of the AIMS impact assessment survey). One thing I found very helpful was involving the staff and loan officers throughout the process-determining which factors were important to measure, translation, data collection, etc. When it came time to giving the survey, we intended to assign a couple of staff to visit clients and collect information, but the loan officers insisted that they would be the best people to interview clients because they knew the clients and would know if the client was telling the truth. What do you think? I realize that it is important to have independent people collecting the surveys who are not biased. When we trained the loan officers and other staff to give the surveys they seemed to do a great job and it was very efficient on time and cost. I'm curious to hear others' opinion on this though, since I know it is usually discouraged.

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Kristi,

The ShoreBank/AMPER project worked with local partner NRSP to implement its livelihoods survey in AJK region after the 2005 earthquake. They made the decision to exclude any NRSP staff (loan officers and others) from interview teams. NRSP is so well embedded in the region, and its staff knows communities so well, that they were an excellent partner across the board, but recognized that survey respondents might give biased answers when speaking to NRSP staff.

In general, it seems that using loan officers to survey can be a bit fraught. Given people's natural tendency to assume survey results will lead to financial assistance, using loan officers as surveyors might reinforce that assumption and lead to biased answers. Perhaps a middle ground would be to have loan officers and others who know their clients well review survey answers and comment on the perceived accuracy of information given.

Post by: Jennifer Mandel

I think this can be very dangerous although, it may not be in every case. The problem is that the people doing the survey are effectively also the ones being evaluated. Respondents in any survey are often inclined to say what they think the researcher wants to hear, having people who are invested in the outcome of the research doing the data collection only reinforces this tendency. Especially in an evaluation, this presents all kinds of potential problems with conflict of interest.

Post by: Caroline Tsilikounas

Dear Kristi (greetings to all and thanks for such a useful set of debates!),

I will use my experience in Bosnia and DRC (Bukavu) to answer the point you raise. I have not found that using loan officers for AIMS-type impact assessment surveys was an issue, since these surveys are quite structured anyway and the main advantage of having a loan officer who knows his/her clients is, as you mentioned, the ability to know if they are telling the truth (and I found that it outweighed any risk of subjective handling). I think that the issue of bias from having a loan officer interview his/her clients is much more pronounced with qualitative research, such as focus group discussions, where interpretation and follow on questions play a critical role. But I look forward to hearing what others think of this.

Post by: Katie Torrington

It is important to limit bias throughout the survey process and I fear using loan officers (or any person with a vested interest in the outcome) presents too many potential risks to the accuracy of the data. Surveyors can be trained to make clients feel comfortable, to ask probing questions to help ensure clients understand the question and reply as accurately as possible, etc. From a cost perspective you do not need to hire a formal survey firm (if cost is an issue) as long as you can provide ample training and oversight to surveyors. I have had incredibly high quality results from students (local and foreign). Using loan officers also limits your capacity to collect feedback from clients on loan officer performance. Finally, (to make a generalization) loan officers are often the busiest staff within an MFI traveling to meet with clients, collecting payments, launching new banks, and completing paperwork back at the office. Asking them to add client surveys to their already full work-load may not be an effective cost savings mechanism as it takes away from their core focus.

Post by: Erik Shapiro

Hi Kristi,

Use of the loan officers could be a double source of bias because:

1) Interviewers will have their own agenda and biases about who to interview and how to ask and record responses.

2) Respondents might tailor their responses to appeal to the loan officers. For this reason I was always trained - when interviewing - to deny even knowing the identity of the client paying for the survey.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi,

I agree with the approach of Kristi Rice/Burundi:

I have trained/coached independent people and also staff in many countries to carry out surveys. The best results I have had in a cost effective manner was from staff who knew the beneficiaries/clients.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi All,

Focused group animated visualization sessions have been able to provide us most of the information needed to design, implement and evaluate successes. However, the survey/impact/engagement format designed by concerned citizens in EDR Congo (Bukavu, Bagira and Goma) is the best I have seen, as it enabled us to collect refined data and also challenge clients to engage themselves in their future and also verify for themselves where they went wrong:
http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/ccmv-assessment-and?context=user
http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/ccmv-guarantor-and-loan?context=user

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POSTING AFFORDABILITY

Post by: Drew Tulchin

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to Day 2

A few short points:

. Affordability. I'm interested in people's short tips and tricks for affordability. If we get enough good ones, we can do a Top 10 like list - with attributions - like the draft paper that is a background document for this event. Earn fame and fortune; give us your sound byte.

. Affordability #2: Let's face it, development projects seem to suffer from either not enough resources (money, time, human capital) or too much/misplaced resources. I'm interested in people's perspectives on how to address the former - especially low human capital in difficult environments and also tactful ways to communicate with donors/program designers on the later.

I've worked only briefly in post conflict and post disaster environments - hats off to full timers doing it. It poses both environmental difficulties but also social ones after the donors move in to help and distort the local economy. How do we get around that?

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Good morning to those waking up in the Western hemisphere!

Our Day 1 discussion was lively enough that it carried over to today, which is great in terms of sharing knowledge and experiences.

I'd like to ask that we now turn our attention toward the cost aspect of survey implementation.

Can we start with your brief "tips and tricks" on survey affordability?

We can carry this second day into Thursday - in fact, we'll keep the discussion "live" through Thursday, albeit without a facilitator present.

Post by: Jennifer Mandel

Good morning everyone.

For dealing with lack of resources, I highly recommend the focus group discussion. I find they are an excellent means of getting a lot of "bang for your buck" in a fairly limited time. I recently completed, with tremendous help from 4 local researchers and a translator, 32 focus groups in rural northern Pakistan. In four weeks we accomplished 1 week of intensive training, 2 weeks of data collection (2 teams doing 2 focus groups each a day, for a total of 4 focus groups a day) and preliminary analysis. We used three different guides so we were able to capture a wide range of information from many different perspectives. In addition to capturing the qualitative information from the focus groups, we also collected some limited quantitative information, mainly socio-demographic, as people were gathering for the discussion and while they were enjoying tea following the discussion. Of course this methodology will not work in all settings or for all topics. It is also very important to structure your groups to ensure that everyone is comfortable with contributing (gender, age, and/or socio-economic stratification, for example). This kind of stratification could theoretically mirror a stratified representative sample often used in collecting survey data. As I said yesterday, however, your objectives and questions should drive the methods you use, but where appropriate, you can get an awful lot of information in a very limited time frame with fairly limited resources using this approach. My one other caveat would be that to ensure the timely production of results, appropriate analysis tools are also necessary, this may include the techniques offered the MicroSave tools, qualitative analysis software such as Nvivo and/or a good stats package, which is important even for very basic descriptive analysis. These can be expensive, but are a worthwhile investment as they can offer big returns in time savings and efficiency.

Post by: Erik Shapiro

ON TIPS AND TRICKS:

This also relates to the "rent or buy" thread of discussion.

Do not be overly impressed by flashy web sites and fancy offices. A firm with a humbler persona might well provide better and cheaper services.

We hired a firm with fancy offices in two states and a flashy website to conduct monthly Spanish language intercept interviews for us in an airport about two hours drive from where we are located. We thought the expense of outsourcing would be more than compensated by not having to pay travel time for one of our interviewers to go there from here.

The first invoice included costs for training a group of eight interviewers, but only two of them were still with the company by the time the interviewing started. They also had a problem with securing interviews, so the first invoice - which was in the thousands - covered only about five completed interviews. In addition, the quality of responses was not acceptable. My cost per interview was in the hundreds of dollars.

We eventually dismissed the firm and sent up our own interviewer, much better and cheaper.

For the same project, we needed to find - in a hurry - Spanish language interviewers in a city about seven hours drive from here. I hired a local temporary employment agency who sent out two women who had never done survey work before. Strapped for time, I met them at the site, gave them a five minute lecture on interviewing, had them try out the questionnaire on each other, and set them to work, closely monitored by me to correct mistakes as they happened. I would grade the interviewing skill and diligence level of these two temporary employees above that of the best of the fancy and flashy firm's "highly trained professional staff" any day of the week. Fancy and flashy is likely to be more expensive, but not necessarily better.

Post by: Drew Tulchin

Dear Colleagues,

Closing Day 2

Thanks to those who participated. Let's hope we can all do at least one thing better next time. We can also hope that technology continues to improve such that we can bring in digital divide elements to this work - handhelds, cell phone surveys, more survey work in local communities at internet cafes. These today are more theoretical and nice rather than realities, but let's hope someday technological benefits can be realized in this area, as well.

I also want to acknowledge good academic efforts that contribute positively to advancing microfinance survey work. There are excellent efforts in the Philippines at AIM, in India, BYU's summer internship program, Princeton, NYU, and many others. Having more qualified people who are interested in this work and know the field will be helpful.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi Everyone,

In response to Drew Tulchin's questions, please find below my experience:

Affordability #1: The most efficient and cost effective surveys we have designed and carried out are as follows:

Surveys coupled with animated visualization sessions: an example: to verify happiness levels, what can make them happy, services needed, who in the community are economically poor and what the community can do about it, if surveys reveal that there is dis-harmony within tribes, a survey of what can be done to overcome them and a survey of who can lead and who can be in the committee to resolve them. – We animated and obtained documentable results from groups of around 300 persons recently within 5 hours for the above and other issues.

Affordability #2:

Design a survey format into the initial questionnaire for basic data, monitoring and evaluation, and carry it out as a part of the process for providing assistance/access to loans, rather than a stand-alone survey to be done by specialized evaluators either for baseline or impact. Train/coach staff on its use and repeat the survey when the second cycle of assistance/loans is to be disbursed. In the survey format we designed to overcome the lack of resources we inserted a) basic data b) surveys for expenses and income, c) verification of current assets, future aspired assets/investments in enhancing livelihoods after investing loans and making profits. d) Needs for BDS/technical training e) Willingness of churches/NGOs/shops in vicinity to guarantee loans f) Loan engagement and signatures and thumb print g) Reimbursement calendar h) approval for 2ndloan.

During the second round the impact of the investment of the loan (i.e. investments for better living, purchase of assets, or any other impact can be measured and documented)

All the information can be documented easily and entered into an excel sheet that field staff can be trained/coached to carry out and send it to supervisors and on to program designers and donors.

The format can be seen at:
http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/ccmv-assessment-and?context=user
http://spmconsortium.ning.com/photo/ccmv-guarantor-and-loan?context=user

Question #3:

Distort of local economy and social issues: We encountered many in the field in post conflict areas: For example: Liberians that had returned when surveyed on why they were not "running" to go back home and re-start their lives rapidly (The same way they "RAN" from the war) responded that "HUNGER SHOULD HIT THEM" in order to motivate them to invest in their future as there were many "Hand Outers" still distributing food and non-food items, killing their initiatives for production as the markets were flooded with donated goods and food. We carried out surveys and sensitization sessions and those who were being assisted by our program identified Talents/Strengths in the community and established CMP&SC (Community Managed Production and Service Centres) to resolve issues.

SETTING RESEARCH GOALS FIRST

Post by: Erik Shapiro

ON YOUTH IN HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS:

The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative [web address www.citiprogram.org] has a worthwhile online class in ethics for research on human subjects. This course has a module on special standards for youthful respondents which might have some useful information for you.

This course is now required for everyone that wants to do research on human subjects and is associated with some U.S. Universities. Use of the course is recently spreading largely as a result of a lawsuit brought by the Havasupai tribe of northern Arizona against Arizona State University, the University of Arizona, and some individual researchers regarding misuse of blood collected for what was supposed to be diabetes research. A good overview of the case is at http://www.phoenixmag.com/lifestyle/200811/arizona-s-broken-arrow/

Probably as a result of the lawsuit, the sections on doing research with Native Americans in the online course have been expanded considerably. I bring this up because it might also be useful for those doing research with traditional/native/aboriginal/first land people outside the U.S.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi Jessica,

I have worked with staff and partners in different countries to design and carry out household surveys for different purposes. However, as the discussion is focused on seeking a cost effective rural or post disaster household survey, I focus on surveys carried out in eastern DR Congo.

What the research / survey project was for (and where)

After implementing a MFR (MicroFinance for Rehabilitation) project to assist those that had lost assets, homes and were displaced due to the volcanic eruption in Goma, for around six months through established MFIs, we carried out a* first* survey/assessment to *verify* if the most vulnerable, excluded and poor were receiving services to restart their lives and* what* the challenges were. As we found that many of the "Non-entrepreneurial" and "vegetating/unfocused" poor were not being served for many reasons, concerned citizens analyzed the challenges and established ACBL (Advisory Centers for Better Living) to provide a package of services. The pre-requisites to receive services were: 1) Payment of $1 as a registration fee and 2) Responding to a questionnaire with a section where current assets/investments and their value was recorded (i.e.* baseline*) by the sponsoring organization/ church/mosque, *verification by staff of the actuality *of the assets value and a third section where the client *aspired/declared/ engaged* to invest profits made by investing the "future" loan to enhance their livelihoods (i.e. have an *impact*). When the first loan had been disbursed and reimbursed, the process was carried out again to *verify and document if the client had attained his/her aspirations/goals*, reasons*/blockages* if not attained, *provide* additional services and * approve* subsequent loans.

> - How you established goals

The goals for carrying out the above surveys/assessments were established in consultation with church/mosque based organizations and concerned citizens, in relation to the unmet needs to enable the excluded obtain services to enhance their livelihoods.

> - What those goals were

As mentioned above: 1) Verification if the excluded were having access to loans 2) documenting services needed 3) Documenting current assets 4) Documenting future aspirations 5) Impact.

> - Lessons learned in this process

The main lesson we learned was that the dialogues revealed the hopelessness of the very poor, HIV+, the ability to rapidly analyze needs and the design of services geared to having impact.

SAMPLING METHODOLOGIES

Post by: Erik Shapiro

Hi All,

This is a great forum. Thanks for all the insights. I am especially interested in following the discussion of sampling methodologies in difficult survey environments.

On staffing and quality control:

The most important characteristic in an interviewer is honesty. Mistakes in writing down survey responses can often be fixed, but "fudged" [fabricated] data are useless.

If not observing the survey process first hand or absent the ability to contact respondents to verify that they were in fact interviewed, the primary vehicle for verification of survey findings is a preliminary analysis of findings as they come in. Do the responses look realistic, or are there unrealistic answers? In a survey on the U.S./Mexican border, one interviewer's expenditure responses were unrealistically high. It turns out she made an honest and correctable mistake by recording expenditures in Mexican pesos rather than U.S. dollars. If there is an available demographic profile of the sample population, compare the demographics to your preliminary findings to see if the responses appear to be from that population. Do cross tabulations where you can compare the responses recorded by different interviewers with each other. If they are surveying the same population, their answers should fall into similar proportions. But if the responses between two interviewers a! re identical, it might be a sign of collusion in fabricating data. Preliminary analyses can also highlight mistakes in sampling. It might be that an interviewer mistakenly assumes a screening procedure that is not stipulated in the survey design. Read verbatim responses to open ended questions to see if the interviewers are probing deeply enough. "Don't know" and "no answer" can be legitimate answers that the best interviewers will encounter, but too many of them can signify a lazy interviewer.

I'm looking forward to day two.

Post by: Linda Jones

Hi,

I think Erik's point below highlights the importance of managing the process from within the organization - even if the actual survey work is subcontracted out. That is, if an organization has the funds but not the people resources to conduct a survey or other market research, they may choose to subcontract. But, there is a lot of room for error in this. An individual from the organization who fully understands the goals of the survey including ultimate target group, must be involved step by step. I have been involved in reviewing surveys for household income generation in Bangladesh where the survey company had not adhered to the written terms of reference, did not really understand the nuances of the goals, and had not designed a sampling frame that would reach the target population adequately. Even when subcontracting a highly professional and experienced firm, it is important to maintain responsibility for reviewing questionnaires, sampling frame, first sets o! f responses and even training of surveyors. The less structured and more qualitative the research, the harder it is to outsource and end up with good results.

Post by: Jamil Ahmad

Hi Linda,

We agree that such elaborate exercise should be undertaken and managed as an in-house process. AMPER hired a manager with over 10 years experience of conducting and managing surveys. The manager hired local teams from the area and trained it.

Post by: Attique Ur Rehman

Dear friends,

It is very exciting to be indulged in very worthy discussion and experience sharing among you all. National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) has been extensively involved in assessing and addressing the needs of rural communities in post-earthquake scenario in Azad Jammu & Kashmir. After the earthquake, we worked with around 0.5 million people in Azad Kashmir where intervention areas were related to emergency food supply, basic health, emergency labor, educational institutions rehabilitation and establishment, microfinance, capacity building and rehabilitation & reconstruction projects. NRSP follows the participatory development approach where social mobilization is the integral part of our campaign.

We are extensively involved in assessment surveys in different fields. In the Rehabilitation & Reconstruction project, funded by WB, we conducted assessment surveys of completely and partially damaged houses for compensation. Around 37,000 households were selected through assessment at household level. Along with other surveys related training needs, livelihood interventions, education and health interventions, we also participated as an implementing partner of SHORE BANK International in household survey of AMPER Project. The characteristics of this survey are as under:

• The questionnaire was designed both in English and URDU language. As Urdu is widely used in almost all areas of Pakistan so this medium was proved very effective.

• Goal of the survey was made crystal clear to all stakeholders being involved in the process. Tools of analysis were harmonized with the goal/objective of survey.

• Enumerators were chosen from local young and energetic men and women. They were given extensive training both class room and field. The selection and training of the locals proved dual impact i.e. cost effective and capacity building of the future implementers of our microfinance project.

• The involvement of the local enumerators was effective as these people were strong enough to move in the relatively tough, hilly and extreme weather area of AJ&K. These people were never found reluctant in extensive travelling on foot and were not scared in meeting and coordination with every walk and segment of local rural community.

• As during survey hours usually women are present at houses, so women enumerators mainly conducted the survey as there were no socio cultural hindrance was involved in this way.

• As NRSP works on participatory development approach having a broad based network of community organizations (CO s), these micro organizations were proved worthy as they helped in choosing random respondents, facilitation in accessibility and cross-verification of survey. Random sampling was proved most appropriate procedure to select a sample among a diversified population.

Post by: Linda Jones

Hi,

Interesting suggestions on how to handle scattered households. Thinking of NRSP, this approach could be used in more sensitive areas as well.

Although I agree fully that random sampling may often be the right approach, in other cases purposeful sampling can provide richer information and be less costly. For microfinance institutions, it may be that random sampling is more often appropriate. For other types of work - such as income generation - I wouldn't say it is so much that one is better but that they have different goals and outcomes.

Best,
Linda

WE'D LIKE YOUR COMMENTS ON POST-DISASTER ECONOMIC RECOVERY STANDARDS

Post by: Jessica Shortall

All,

As a parallel track to our "cost effective surveys" discussion today, we'd like to invite your input on a set of standards, developed by SEEP, for economic recovery efforts after crises.

We had some technical difficulties getting these documents up yesterday. On www.microlinks.org/sc/householdsurvey , please see the "Documents" section. We have just uploaded two documents called "SEEP Economic Recovery..." These deal with the Minimum Standards for Economic Recovery After Crisis.

We would welcome your feedback on these documents, especially on how your experience confirms or contradicts the core "minimum standards" proposed for assessment and survey work in crisis-affected environments, briefly summarized as follows:

Assessment must be ongoing in order to ensure reasonably informed decision-making in a highly fluid and sometimes volatile market environment;

Monitoring and evaluation systems are a critical up-front tool for program managers working to respond effectively within these complex environments;

Importance of dynamic analysis, one that captures the interdependencies of household economics, which are particularly crucial in a post-crisis environment. For example, measuring diverse income streams (formal and informal) with accuracy, measuring human capacity and human "capital," and how these factors interact to present both opportunities and challenges for households dealing with crisis;

Systemic approaches, emphasizing multi-disciplinary teams to better capture complex contextual realities of the environment, whether economic, political, social, institutional, etc;

Relevancy to the affected communities, households and individuals is essential. Assessment and survey tools should be grounded in a clear understanding of what kinds of information are needed by whom, and how this information is used in the decision-making process;

Formats must be appropriate to the immediate needs of the information users. Information should be easily exported into high-level briefs for program managers and decision-makers, broader presentation for collaborating partners, and more granular, technical reports for M&E specialists;

Dissemination and communication of assessment results is key to effective collaboration by stakeholders in crisis-recovery planning and execution;

Ensure a broad range of information sources - existing research as well as local and international, formal and informal;

Sensitivity to interest groups and inherent biases among the respondents. Judgment, experience, triangulation methods, and "coherency tests" can flag potential biases within data sets;

Transparency is key, including a detailed statement of assumptions and methods used in assessment and survey activity, so that a range of end-users can evaluate and utilize the data effectively.

BACK-UP PLANS TO HELP CONTROL COSTS

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Hi all,

We've reached our Western-hemisphere lunchtime lull again so I thought I'd re-start things with a statement to ask you to respond and react to with your own experiences:

Developing contingency plans, budgets, schedules, and even staff, while incurring an up-front cost, can create significant savings in the event that plans have to change due to changing circumstances on the ground.

Do you have experience with developing back-up plans - and if so, have you found them to be a worthwhile use of resources?

Best

Jessica Shortall.

Post by: Katie Torrington

In my experience, the most helpful aspect of assessments for a backup plan is sampling. There will inevitably be last minutes changes due to availability, weather, miscommunication, etc. Establishing a client selection protocol with surveyors in advance can save costly delays. Whenever time permits we will have surveyors revisit the client to try to reach the full list of clients from the original sample. If funding/time does not permit we use a preselected list of 'back-up' clients for surveyors can replace their missing client with someone from the back-up list.

Post by: Stephanie Chen

Hello everyone,

Thanks for all of your great advice and insights over the last two days.

On the topic of back-up plans, I was wondering if any of you would be willing to share some surprises or unexpected challenges you may have encountered in your contingency plans - for instance, did one element/aspect of your back-up plan end up costing much more than you originally planned? What have you learned to keep those costs low the next time you develop and implement a survey?

Look forward to hearing and learning from your experiences.

Post by: Sunimal Alles

Hi everyone,

Backup plans:

While working in different post conflict/disaster areas and host countries where refugees lived, I have found that it was necessary to creatively visualize the goals/aspirations of communities, carry out community/focused group surveys to establish a list of activities to live better lives and develop a work/activity plan with time lines, in order to rapidly attain the aspirations. Once the community was energized to attain the aspirations as they had visualized the future, they were motivated to move forward. We rarely needed to have back up plans. The only changes I recorded was in the work/activity time line as we faced challenges at times (Insecurity, road closures, lack of resources, embezzlement, availability of participants, unwillingness of MFIs/banks to assist refugees needing to develop alternative strategies).

Working with concerned citizens and representatives of NGOs in North Kivu (Goma) we developed a plan that ha! d different options and contact persons, to respond to potential emergencies, recovery, stabilization and development. (War, earthquakes, gas from Lake Kivu, boats capsizing, volcanic eruption)

SUMMARY (AND CLOSING)

Post by: Jessica Shortall

Day Two: Closing

Thanks once again for a lively and informative discussion. This will likely be the last facilitated post from me, but we will keep the forum live for Thursday (and into Friday if the discussion remains very active). After that point there's no need to unsubscribe - the discussion via email will end.

All posts, summaries, and documents will remain on www.microlinks.org/sc/householdsurvey. Please feel free to share with colleagues. Within a few days we will upload a final summary document, synthesizing lessons and ideas from this session. We'll send an email out letting you know when this is available.

If you do continue to participate tomorrow, please feel free to touch on the subject of "what next?" What is the future of surveying for microfinance and development? Are there any big movements, connections, or knowledge-sharing initiatives in the field that you'd like to see happening?

To recap the discussion today:

We heard from more organizations, including MEDA, Zardozi in Afghanistan, NRSP in Pakistan, and World Relief. And we have gotten perspectives from even more parts of the world: Uganda, China, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Bosnia.

We continued some conversations, including:

1. "After the survey"
   a. Present findings to the community to complete the circle
   b. Disseminate information in order to prevent duplication by other organizations

2. Language in survey development
   a. Interesting point on "back translating" - asking local language speakers to re-translate into English to make sure meanings are clear
   b. Remember that a concept in one language might not be the same in another culture/language

3. Personnel
   a. Female surveyors can be important - especially when women will be the ones present at home during survey hours
   b. Consider "mix" of staff from different backgrounds (language, social levels, qualifications) to create a balance and reduce bias
   c. Most agreed to avoid using local MF or community development staff as interviewers - could lead to biased answers and/or expectation of financial aid. In "impact" surveys this can be especially dangerous as the people doing the survey would be the same organization being evaluated.

And we discussed cost-effective implementation:

1. Preparation
   a. Collect all primary and secondary data needed for immediate program design and future expansion and reporting at the same time
   b. Have a clear definition of survey objectives
   c. Produce a work plan/schedule listing tasks to be done and those responsible
   d. Create a budget and monitor costs
   e. Focus group discussion - lots of "bang for the buck" in a limited time
      i. Example - project in rural northern Pakistan: Four weeks. 1 week of training, two weeks of data collection through focus groups, and preliminary analysis
      ii. Example: Documented results from 300 people in 5 hours in DRC

2. Implementation
   a. Bring rural, scattered householders into one location for surveying (if possible) - Requires a local partner's help
   b. PDAs ensured quality data collection because any problems could be resolved immediately. Saved a lot of money in data entry, cleaning and verification process. The upfront investment would be large, but if surveys are a tool used regularly by an organization this might be a tool worth investigating
   c. You do not need to hire a formal survey firm as long as you can provide ample training and oversight to surveyors

3. Back-up plans
   a. Back-up plan sampling helps prepare for last minute changes due to availability, weather, mis-communication. "Establishing a client selection protocol with surveyors in advance can save costly delays"

Thanks to our sponsors and to our facilitators for their steady input and thoughts. And thanks to all f you - whether you posted or just read and learned - for coming together to discuss a very worthwhile topic.

Finally, we'd love your feedback. Please email me directly with good, bad, and ugly - what worked and what didn't, whether you got what you wanted out of it, and anything you think could improve a future Speaker's Corner, whether it is content, style, or technology.

Post by: Jesse Fripp

Dear Colleagues -

I would like to echo Jessica's words of appreciation for a very engaging exchange from the broader community. Surveys and assessment - and their distant cousins, market segmentation and sizing - are clearly critical to providing "chalk lines" to informed and relevant product and service design and delivery in crisis-affected environments.

As a final comment on the core questions for today, I would offer that the advance time and preparation spent on relevant, informed, and localized survey design up-front is nearly always more than made up - from a cost/benefit perspective, and a humanitarian perspective - in a more effective, focused and informed response to the needs of communities affected by crisis, either conflict or natural disaster. Due to the general market information failures and physical and infrastructure challenges of the environment, household surveys in crisis will at best be a "snapshot," with finite validity and high margins of error. The lens of experience, common-sense, and the peripheral awareness of unintended consequences must always be applied to the rush to interpret results in response to overwhelming needs. Seemingly evident conclusions drawn from even the best surveys in these circumstances require a healthy degree of skepticism, tempered by urgency.

However, this grainy picture can ensure that finite resources that have the potential to tip the balance between recovery and collapse of a community can be structured in such a way that better empowers and catalyzes the inherent resilience of humanity in crisis. Biases are cross-cutting, and robust survey tools help to ensure that we - as professional development practitioners - methodically check our own assumptions as to the real priorities, context, and opportunities of a community affected by catastrophe, and that we respond appropriately.

We're pleased to have had the opportunity to join our experience to that of so many others in spirited debate and sharing. I look forward to many continued discussions. Special thanks to SEEP and MicroLinks for the venue and the excellent facilitation by Jessica, Anna, and many others.

Post by: V Vivekanandan

Dear Jessica,

I have been eavesdropping on the second day's discussions. I had to go from Trivandrum, my place of residence, to Cochin, 250 km away for a meeting. This handicapped my ability to participate, though I would check mail surreptitiously on my laptop while in the meeting. Not being a person who does that much of the kind of survey work that most of the others seemed to be doing, I felt that I could contribute very little on the nitty-gritty being discussed. However, there was a lot that I could learn.

Thanks for the opportunity.

THANK YOU AND OTHER MICROLINKS OPPORTUNITIES

Post by: Anna Van der Heijden

Dear participants,

On behalf of USAID and the microLINKS team, I wanted to thank you all for participating in this online discussion. Special thanks of course go to Jessica Shortall of Social Enterprise Associates for leading the dialogue, and to all the participants and facilitators and featured contributors who contributed or listened to this dialogue.

We had 114 participants from 25 countries join us over the past 2 days. Together you all posted 86 messages related to household surveys. You can continue to review these messages and related resources online at www.microlinks.org/sc/householdsurvey. When the summary document is ready, we will also post it on this page.

Thanks again for your participation, and please do let us know your comments on this forum. We want to make these discussions relevant to your work, so we appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Finally, to stay up to date on other activities on microLINKS -- the USAID knowledge and learning platform where this discussion took place -- please consider signing up for the microLINKS monthly newsletter at www.microlinks.org/connections. The newsletter reports on new resources, research reports, webinars, and other online and interactive activities on the microLINKS platform.

Regards,

Anna van der Heijden

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