

# Key Informant Interviews

Used as a tool to explore related issues and problems associated with a given topic, a key informant interview involves talking to persons such as extension workers, key farmers, local government officials, traders, and community leaders who know the area or certain aspects of the problem (Jimenez 1985).

## What is key informant interview?

The key informant interview refers to getting information from an individual who is considered to be particularly knowledgeable about the topic of interest. This person is called "key informant". The semi-structured interview is usually conducted in a face to face setting which permits the researcher to seek new insights, ask questions, and assess phenomena in different perspectives. The KII is used when written records or published documents are limited or do not exist, when information different perspectives is needed, and when there are key informants who are accessible and have in-depth knowledge about a topic.

## Who are the key informants?

Key informants are a select group of people who are especially knowledgeable or experienced about certain issues or problems and are willing to share their knowledge. For example, for information on production of certain crops in the district, key informants at this level may comprise of the following: the district officer, the extension officer, agronomist or subject matter specialist. On the other hand, if the problem is on localized pest infestation in certain areas in the district, then the key informants may be identified from among farmers, farm leader, extension technicians and the plant protection officer.

In a key informant interview, one is looking for provocative ideas and useful insights, not just for statistics. Thus, the respondents must be chosen based on their knowledge and expertise to provide the needed information. With this purpose in mind, it is necessary to:

- Interview people with competence on the subject under study.
- Seek the views and opinions of those who have relevant experience.
- Enlist those who have the ability to communicate their experiences effectively.
- Find an informant who can give reliable information.

## How are key informants selected?

The informant should be someone who understands the situation and can analyze it. Perhaps the most direct method of selecting key informants is to consult strategically placed experts working in the area under study who should be able to recommend the

most informative, experienced, and analytical individuals. To increase the likelihood that the informants will be useful, it may be necessary to select those informants who have been recommended by several sources, especially if the different sources are known to have dissimilar points of view.

### **How many informants should be selected?**

The interview should be conducted with enough informants to ensure adequate representation of different types of experiences. The interview should be carried out to a point when researchers will find that additional interviews do not provide new insights and the answers fall into a pattern with which they are already familiar. At this stage, further interviewing may not be necessary.

### **Preparing the key informant interview guide**

The key informant interview guide should contain questions to solicit information critical to a certain problem or issue. For example, on issues related to pest problems, the following questions should be contained in the guide.

- Major pest problems
- Perception of the causes of the pest problems
- Steps taken by farmers to overcome the pest problems
- Resources required to overcome the problems
- KAP on usage of pesticides: method, dosage, frequency
- Relationship between pest control and water management.
- Pest control and labor utilization
- Pest control and post-harvest activities
- Institutional support to overcome the problems
- Costs involved

### **How questions should be asked**

In formulating the questions for the key informant interview guide, it is generally useful to orient questions around these aspects:

- 1) 'what is happening'
- 2) 'what is being done'
- 3) 'what is the outcome'

For example, in a certain behavioral outcome of farmers (reducing insecticide use in the early crop stage), what action, influence or methods will be able to produce it based on your experiences? When asking the above questions, the researcher should ask for illustrations, the informants' experiences with regard to the topic, and tentative conclusion and generalization

## How to get information from key informants

To obtain the information needed from a key informant, a researcher can talk with them informally, use formal techniques such as written questionnaires, telephone interviews, personal interviews, group interviews or community forums and public hearings (McKillip 1987).

### Interview guidelines

Although there are no clear-cut rules for conducting key informant interview (KII), these guidelines are suggested:

- **Establish rapport** - Remember that the respondent is doing you a favor and you are seeking information. In order to break the 'psychological barrier' of trust, you need to develop a sense of 'closeness' to him. Reassure your respondent that you are genuinely interested in the information and respect what is said. Always be pleasant, receptive, and patient and do not interrupt when he is talking.
- **Be neutral and objective** - Never express that you approve or disapprove of what the informant says. If he says what you think, tell him what he thinks is more important, or that you'll discuss your views when the interview is over. Do not let him divert you from the subject. Remember that you're after information; rapport is a means to an end. When he digresses from the main point, gently get the informant back on the subject. If he is not responsive to a question, try saying nothing yourself. Many respondents will start talking just to 'fill up' a long silence.
- **Probe** - To encourage informants to elaborate on a certain response, the researcher needs to probe.. Here are some examples of probing:
  - That's very interesting. Can you tell me more about that?*
  - You say that .... I would love to hear more about what you have in mind.*
  - How do you figure that out?*
  - Can you think of anything else?*

The interviewer can often encourage the informant to give additional information by making encouraging remarks or gestures, e.g., nodding your head, saying 'yes' or 'ugh, huh'. Or just repeat or summarize what he had said. This gives him a chance to amend and add information. You still remain agreeable toward what he says, but you point out inconsistencies or suggest that perhaps you didn't get it right. 'Check' questions or similar questions with slightly different wording at different points in the interview will also help clarify inconsistent or incomplete responses. If he gives a polite generic answer, probe for a more realistic statement (e.g., 'Tell me more about how you feel about this.'). Thank the respondent for his cooperation when you finish the interview.

## **Analytical procedure and techniques**

There are several ways to analyze the information received. Essentially, the KII information can be analyzed using the following:

- **Summarizing the data** - Ensure that they can be understood, interpreted or related to some decisions to be made. Emerging patterns or trends, strongly held opinions and frequently held opinions should be noted.
- **Reviewing notes** - Sections of the notes that relate to each question should be highlighted. Participant comments that may be worthy of future quotation should be marked.
- **Examining questions** – Questions are examined one at a time. After all responses to a question have been examined, a brief summary statement that describes the discussion is prepared. Attention is placed on identifying the themes or patterns across the groups as well as themes that relate to respondents with similar demographic characteristics.

## **Write the report**

Reflect back to the objectives of the study and the information needed by the research. The type and scope of the final report will guide the analysis process. For example, KII reports typically fall into three categories: (a) brief oral reports that highlight key findings, (b) descriptive reports that summarize comments or observation of participants, and (c) analytical reports that highlight key trends or findings and also include selected comments as examples.

## **References**

- Jimenez PR. 1985. Participant observation. In Bautista ML, Go SP, editors. Introduction to qualitative research methods. Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Research Center. p 144 – 156.
- McKillip, Jack. 1987. Need analysis: Tools for the human services and education. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.