

# Key Informant Interviews



## What is a key informant interview?

- The term “key informant” refers to a person who can provide detailed information and opinions on a particular subject based on his/her knowledge of this particular issue.
- Example: If you need information on how project activities have influenced the use of water resources in the community, key informants could be the leaders of a water users' group.
- Key informants can be young or old and may come from a variety of socioeconomic or ethnic groups.
- Key informant interviews (KIIs) are open-ended, semistructured interviews. Every interview should have clear objectives in terms of *what kind of information is needed* and *how this information will be used*.
- The output of a KII is a textual description of a situation, guided by standard questions.

## When are KIIs needed?

- Key informant interviews are tools that will help one to develop an *in-depth understanding of qualitative* issues and obtain *suggestions and recommendations* from key informants. They may thus provide a basis to explore new ideas that have not been discussed before.
- Often, KIIs are used to gather qualitative information that will be used to “triangulate”<sup>1</sup> the findings of other types of evaluation methods (e.g., quantitative surveys).
- While there are other qualitative evaluation tools (e.g., focus group discussions<sup>2</sup>), KIIs are best used if *some type of information can only be obtained in a context of full confidentiality*.

*Example: In order to understand why 80% of members of farmer groups are not satisfied with project services, as shown in a recent survey, interviewing key informants (e.g., reputable leaders of farmer groups or individual farmers) may be better than organising focus group discussions with groups of farmers, as some farmers may be too shy to express their views in public or in front of their leaders.*

- Also, this is the method best recommended for complex issues of a more general nature or for issues that may concern the whole community and for which individual farmers may not have answers.

## Limitations of KIIs

While KIIs have a number of advantages—for example, they provide the opportunity to explore new ideas and they are simple to conduct and inexpensive—they also have a number of limitations:

- The information obtained *can be biased* if the key informant was not properly selected. Key informants are not necessarily among village elites or leaders; a key informant can also be a simple farmer who is known to be smart, respected and outspoken.
- Results of key KIIs will not always be representative of what the entire community thinks and they may *overlook the perspectives of community members who are less visible*. Again, this stresses the importance of careful selection of key informants.
- The information that one will get will provide very little basis for quantification. This is why such method should be used in conjunction with surveys.
- Open-ended information is more difficult and time-consuming to synthesise well enough to obtain clear results. Also, it can be difficult to keep interviews focused, making different interviews difficult to compare properly.
- Key informant interviews are also usually more difficult to conduct and they require more interviewing skills. The interviewer will need to be well prepared and well informed in order to get the most out of the interview.
- Key informant interviews are also susceptible to interviewer bias, as the interviewer may only pick up information that confirms his/her preconceived ideas.

<sup>1</sup> In social sciences, **triangulation** means that more than two methods are used in a study with a view to double (or triple) checking results. This is also called “cross examination”.

<sup>2</sup> See Technical Guidelines N° 3.

## Before going to the field

- Identify the discussion topics for which you need answers. The number and kinds of topics to discuss with key informants will depend on the time and resources available.
- The questions should be such that interviewees can express opinions through a discussion/dialogue. A logical sequence of the questions should help the discussion flow. (See annex for examples of questions.)
- For each discussion topic, prepare an *interview guide*.
- For each discussion topic, determine how many interviews are required (usually 3-4 per discussion topic).

### Interview guide – suggested content

- **Name of interviewer and key informant**
- **Location and date**
- **Brief description of the objectives of the interview**
- **Lists of questions for the key informant, with blank space on which to write answers**
- **Blank space for general comments by the interviewer(s)**

- Identify the key informants. This is usually done by:
  - ♦ Identifying the relevant groups from which key informants may be drawn (e.g., water user associations, women groups).
  - ♦ Consulting several knowledgeable persons (e.g., village leaders, field workers, project staff) who will help you select your key informants. For each discussion topic, be sure to interview a mix of people (of different ages, ethnicity, religious affiliation, educational level).
  - ♦ Preparing the final list of key informants but being ready to add additional key informants once interviews are started (it often happens that, during an interview with a key informant, the name of a new key informant may be suggested).

In most cases, 15 to 35 key informants are sufficient for most studies or even less if KIs are combined with other methods.

- Train interviewers to ensure that they understand the purpose and they develop the proper skills (how to encourage discussion, take accurate and useful notes, etc.). Training needs to address team preparation, interview context, selection of key informants, sensitive listening, sensitive questioning, judging responses, recording the interview and self-critical review.
- Pretest the interview guides to make sure that the questions are appropriate and accurate enough, and that the answers permit useful analysis. Pretesting provides an opportunity to determine whether the wording of the questions is appropriate, whether questions elicit discussion and whether questions are easily understood. Pretesting can be conducted during the training of enumerators.

## Data collection

- Upon arrival in each village, talk to the village leader to present the work being conducted and ask for permission to interview village members.
- When you start the interview with the key informant, introduce yourself, the project (if needed) and explain the purpose of the interview. Be sure the informant understands the purpose of the interview and what you intend to do with the information you will receive from him/her.
- A good introduction will gain the interest and cooperation of the respondent without biasing the respondent's answers. Emphasise the fact that the interview results will remain confidential (in the sense that the name of the informant will not be associated with the answers collected).
- As in focus group discussions, KIs are best conducted by two people, one leading the discussion and the other taking note. Accurate note taking is particularly important to make analysis and interpretation possible.
- A good interviewer will have the following abilities:
  - ♦ Ability to listen and neutrality (does not share his/her own views on the subject)
  - ♦ Familiarity with the issue discussed (to be able to ask additional, unanticipated questions if required)
  - ♦ Ability to seek clarification and elaboration on initial responses provided while maintaining a conversational tone (to avoid making the informant feel interrogated, judged or misunderstood.)

## Data analysis and reporting

- Proper note taking during the interview will facilitate the analysis<sup>3</sup> stage. It is also a good idea to sit down right after each interview and put your thoughts on paper: a summary, your impressions of the key informant's feelings, and anything else that seems relevant.
- Since the result of each interview will be long hand-written interview texts, the first step involves the preparation of electronic interview summaries so as to reduce information into manageable themes, issues and recommendations. These summaries will only retain the key views, main points and recommendations made by each key informant.
- At the same time, it can be useful to add descriptive codes in the margin of hand-written interview texts. This will allow you, in subsequent stages, to more easily retrieve detailed information related to a specific topic or find more easily exact quotes from the informants.

⇒ *For example, if a recurrent sub-question under all main questions was "access to information by the poor", the descriptive code "Poor-ACS" can be handwritten in the margin of the hand-written interview text whenever this issue is covered in the document.*

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<sup>3</sup> Links to useful guidelines: [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNABS541.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNABS541.pdf) and <http://www.wfp.org/content/technical-guidance-sheet-no9-qualitative-data-collection-and-analysis-food-security-assessments>

- The next step will involve the consolidation of all interview summaries. For each discussion topic/ theme, a short report (2-3 pages) should be produced, showing the most important elements to take into consideration for project management. Convergent views, as well as conflicting opinions, shall be highlighted.
- Whenever possible, visual displays (tables, boxes, charts) shall be used to help communicate the findings more effectively.
- When the same topic was discussed both in focus group discussions and KIs, compile the findings in the same report. If both are also combined with a quantitative survey, you can then prepare a case study report.

## ANNEX

### **Framework for developing the key informant questionnaire guides - examples.**

<b>Topic and key informant</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Suggested questions</b>
<p><b>External factors affecting food security and agricultural production during the last 12 months</b></p> <p><i>Possible key informants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Village leaders/ elders</i></li> <li>• <i>Representatives of farmers' groups</i></li> <li>• <i>Representatives of women groups</i></li> <li>• <i>Village doctors/ nurses</i></li> <li>• <i>Government extension staff who know the village well</i></li> </ul>	<p>Assess whether external shocks have had a significant impact on the food security of the population in the village</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What shocks have affected the population of the village during the past 12 months? (drought, floods, crop pests and diseases, livestock diseases, sudden lack or loss of employment, unusually high level of human disease, fire, high costs of agricultural inputs, earthquake, theft, conflicts, etc.)</li> <li>• How have these shocks affected agricultural production and farmers' income?</li> <li>• Which categories of households were the most affected (e.g., farmers, pastoralists, female-headed households)?</li> <li>• What are the other effects on food security at the household and community levels?</li> <li>• Were there any interventions by the government or NGOs to address the situation? Was it enough? Did all households benefit?</li> <li>• If such external shocks/events would occur again in the near future, what could the project do to help?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Natural resource management (NRM)</b></p> <p><i>Possible key informants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NRM group members</i></li> <li>• <i>Government extension staff who know the village well</i></li> </ul>	<p>Assess whether NRM activities are having the intended impact on livelihoods of the community</p> <p>Identify problems and find solutions for improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When has the group been functional? What is the composition of the group? What is the purpose/ mandate of the group?</li> <li>• What is the current status of the natural resource base? (e.g., is pasture land overgrazed? are forests overexploited?) How important is this natural resource base for the livelihoods of the community?</li> <li>• How many members are actively participating? What is the frequency of meetings?</li> </ul>

Topic and key informant	Objectives	Suggested questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Staff from environmental protection agency who know the village well</i></li> <li>• <i>Village leaders/ elders</i></li> <li>• <i>Farmers not part of the NRM group and known for their reluctance to be part of the NRM group</i></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the activities that have been implemented so far by the group? Are these activities already having a positive impact on the natural resource base?</li> <li>• Are group activities well accepted by the whole community/villages? What are the principle problems encountered? Is the group able to solve problems effectively?</li> <li>• How can natural resource management activities be further improved?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Infrastructure management</b></p> <p><i>Possible key informants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Representatives of infrastructure users' groups (e.g., water users' associations)</i></li> <li>• <i>Villagers who use the infrastructure</i></li> <li>• <i>Representatives of women's groups</i></li> <li>• <i>Village leaders/ elders</i></li> <li>• <i>District/gov. civil engineers who know the village well</i></li> </ul>	<p>Understand whether infrastructure are effectively managed and responsive to the needs of the community</p> <p>Identify ways for improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the condition of existing village infrastructure (roads, schools, drinking water, transport, irrigation, communication, sanitation)?</li> <li>• What new infrastructure did the project finance? What types of infrastructure were renovated with project support? How was the infrastructure constructed/renovated? (e.g., by the villagers themselves, by a construction company)</li> <li>• What was the process for selecting the infrastructure to be constructed/renovated? Was it an inclusive process? Did women and the youth participate in this identification/selection process?</li> <li>• How many people are/will benefit from these new/renovated infrastructure? Are people satisfied with the infrastructure? How has the infrastructure changed the living conditions of the beneficiaries?</li> <li>• What are the systems in place for infrastructure operation and maintenance? Are these systems/mechanisms effective? Do people pay fees or taxes to use this infrastructure?</li> <li>• What are the current problems? What could be done to solve these problems?</li> </ul>

Topic and key informant	Objectives	Suggested questions
<p><b>Access to markets</b></p> <p><i>Possible key informants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Representatives from farmers' groups or associations</i></li> <li>• <i>Local traders</i></li> <li>• <i>Staff from local auction yards</i></li> <li>• <i>Staff from local/central agricultural statistics bureau</i></li> <li>• <i>Local transporters</i></li> </ul>	<p>Understand whether there is an enabling environment to improve farmers' access to markets</p> <p>Identify constraints and potentials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the main crops grown in the area? Where and how are they sold? Are they sold at the farm gate through middlemen or through bulk transportation organised by farmers? Do farmers tend to store their production to sell it at the best price? Do farmers have some bargaining power to obtain the best prices for their products? Are there contract farmers in the area?</li> <li>• Are there physical barriers to markets (e.g., poor road networks)? Are there trade or production restrictions (e.g., trade regulation, price controls, production bans)?</li> <li>• Is the right infrastructure in place: energy and water infrastructure (to lower production and marketing risks)? rural roads? transportation and market infrastructure? storing and processing infrastructure?</li> <li>• Do local farmers have access to information on prices of products and the local level and at final consumer level; quality requirements (e.g., export markets; supermarkets), about places and best periods for selling their products, about potential buyers? About niche markets?</li> <li>• Are local farmers organised in farmer organizations? If so, what type of services do these extend to their members?</li> <li>• For each of these main crops, what were the average prices given to farmers for their production at the farm gate, and how much were these products sold in the local markets? Is there high price volatility for these crops? How do farmers access information on market prices?</li> <li>• What are the crops that could be grown in the project area and which would have a better marketing potential?</li> </ul>

## Source

M&E/KM Toolkit, Asia Pacific Division, Unpublished materials. May 2011.