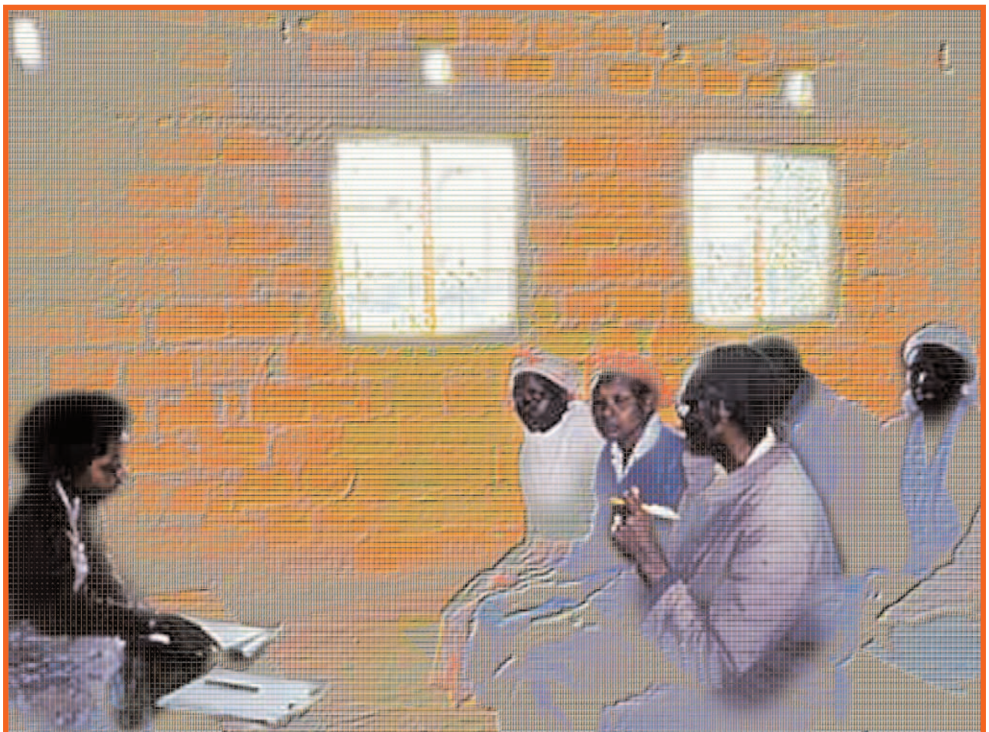
Information: its collection and use throughout the Project Cycle



– using **surveys, PRAs, samples,** etc.

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Information:

its collection and use throughout the Project Cycle

Part 1: Why do you need good information?

WHY DO YOU NEED GOOD INFORMATION?

Here's a story to think about.

You need to take your sick goat to a Veterinary Doctor. He is sitting in a dark room with the shutters closed. He looks at the goat and then closes his eyes. "I know all about goats", he says, "I spent five years at Vet school. The most common problem is that they eat rubbish that upsets their stomach. Go next door to the hardware store. Buy a half-litre of liquid paraffin and pour it down the goat. That will be five dollars. Goodbye".

Have you found a good Vet? No? Why?

Now you are the Director of an NGO making your first serious project plan. Will you close the shutters, sit with your eyes shut and say, "I know all about the beneficiaries and their problems. I know what will make their situation better. This is what we are going to do…"?

Would you be acting as the best kind of Director?

"To make good decisions, you need good information".

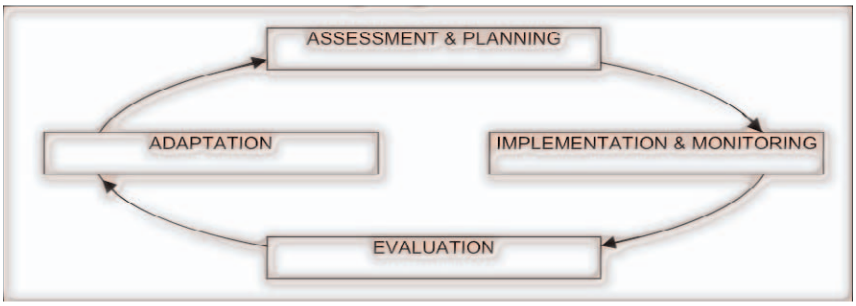
WHEN DO YOU NEED GOOD INFORMATION?

NGOs need reliable information. At certain points of your work you need it especially. If you have projects it is hoped that you are following the Project Cycle, consciously or unconsciously.

The Project cycle says that you plan a project with its objectives and activities. Then you implement the plan, while monitoring the activities. Then you evaluate whether the objectives have been achieved, gathering information that leads to a better plan. Your next plan will then be better and so on – in a cycle.

If you need to revise your knowledge in this area, go to **www.networklearning.org** and find the manual "How to Build A Good Small NGO". You can download the section on the Project Cycle.

THE PROJECT CYCLE



The first point at which you need good information is when you start planning. To make a good plan you need information from the community, by doing something like a Participatory Needs Assessment. Unless you have a good understanding of the most important needs faced by your beneficiary group, you cannot design a project that meets their needs.

Many NGOs get stuck in projects that are fairly irrelevant. But if you carry out a good Needs Assessment you answer the question "are we planning to go down the right road?" Then, during the implementation of the project, you need information to monitor what is going on. You ask, "How are we progressing down the road?" And at the end you need information that allows you to evaluate, to ask, "Did we choose the right road?"

WHEN NGOS GET GOOD INFORMATION – TWO EXAMPLES

An NGO was starting a village-level Health Project. They thought they could start Primary Health Care in 25 villages, with training for 25 Village Health Workers. But the Needs Assessment showed them the importance of the ethnic mix in the villages – that people from one group did not feel comfortable going to Health Workers from another group. They decided to train two Health Workers per village and reduce the number of villages to 15.

A small NGO had been lending money to women. Then they got the funding to expand the project into a proper credit programme, At that point they held a Workshop to collect information on "lessons learnt so far". They identified the biggest lesson as this: in that particular culture, people are very reluctant to repay. So they had to design a programme which made it difficult not to repay. They recruited Business Advisors so that loans only went to good proposals that got continual technical business support. And they developed systems of group and individual guarantors. The result was a good rate of repayment.

Part 2: Information needed throughout the Project Cycle – and how to get it

2.1 THE ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING STAGE OF THE PROJECT CYCLE

PRACTICE BY DOING THE EXERCISES

If you are not involved with a project at the moment, then role-play by following the Case Study. Assume that you are now part of the Management Team of a Watsan NGO.

DEVELOP A DRAFT PLAN

Here is what you want for the Watsan project. You plan a Water and Sanitation (Watsan) project in some villages in your District. Your organisation has been working in Watsan with a European NGO but now, direct help has come to an end. You have to start a new project with your own personnel. You need to write a first-class project proposal. If you do, you will probably get funding from the European NGO up to a certain amount. They have said that their limit is 8,000 yurr (local currency). They do not like to pay for the costs of putting a Project Proposal together. Your NGO has a little money in the bank but is not actively fund-raising.

WRITE A GOOD LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Many bigger organisations write these grids – Logical Frameworks – to make sure that no important part of the project plan is forgotten.

Here is one layout:

Goal	Indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions
Purpose			
Output			
Activities			

Here, the Watsan NGO is beginning to fill in the Logical Framework for the new Project plan:

Goal	Indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions
1 Health conditions are at optimal levels as planned in the villages/district	1.1 Incidence of water related and waterborne diseases is now insignificant	— Statistics/reports for government health department — Statistics/reports form local and INGO	• Other health threatening factors are to similar degree controlled
Purpose			
2 To provide clean and sufficient water to all inhabitants of .... District	2.1 All inhabitants are able to draw 50 litres of water per person from a water point not further than 250 meters from the homes	— Reports from local people, esp. women — Project reports — Project evaluation information	• Water is year round available • Sufficient and clean water is available
Output			
3 To construct 5 protected water wells in each village in .... District (total ... villages times 5 wells = ... water wells)	3.1 After 10 months all villages have 5 protected and functioning wells	— Interviews with local people, esp. women — Project monitoring reports — Project evaluation information	• Construction capacity in NGO is adequate • No scarcity of building materials
Activities			
4 Establishment of water committees	4.1 Over 75% of community members participated in the meetings 4.2 Half of the members are female	— Minutes from meetings — Monitoring reports — Minutes — Interviews with women	• community prioritises and supports the project • women are allowed to participate in public functions
5 Training of water committees	5.1 Female members are taking executive posts in the committee 5.2 The quality of training materials and handouts has been confirmed by .... (water department) 5.3 All Committee members participated the training and passed the test	— Minutes — Interviews with women — Evaluation of the training materials — Communication and reports from water department — Minutes from the training sessions — Evaluation of the test results — Follow up on performance of the Water committee regarding skills/ knowledge	• villagers/women are literate or have literate helpers • people have time to participate in the training

Activities (Continued)	**Indicators**	**Means of verification**	**Assumptions**
6 Training of the communities/users	6.1 Meetings in each community have been held covering 80% of the dwellers		• people have time to participate in the training
7 To liase with the district authorities and with INGO to co-ordinate implementation	7.1 The NGOs is a member of the district water and sanitation platform 7.2 There are weekly contacts with the district authority/INGO	— Reports from the district — Minutes and information from the district	• District is involved with WatSan
8 To arrange for community meetings re location and design of the water points	8.1 Community meetings have been held 8.2 Maps with preferential locations have been drawn by the community 8.3 Communities have been involved in the discussions about technology choice	— Interviews at community level — Minutes — Evaluation of the maps — Minutes of community meetings — Interviews — Minutes	• roads are all weather passable • conditions in the rural areas are safe
9 To select reliable suppliers for building materials	9.1 Tender procedure for procurement has been developed 9.2 Information about reliability of local suppliers has been collected 9.3 A tender evaluation committee has been established	— Minutes — Procedure — Report with related information — List with names	
10 To arrange for storage of materials	10.1 Locations for storage have been agreed 10.2 Admininstrative procedures for handling have been established	— Minutes — Planning	
	Input		
	Budget		
	Infrastructure, e.g. offices		

The project will last one year.

CHECK THE CAPACITY OF YOUR NGO

Read Section 3.9 *Selecting and Training the team*.

Write down the skills you need within your NGO before you start this project – how many people, and with what abilities? For example you need one person who can keep track of the money and keep accounts.

THE OBJECTIVES

What do you think of the goals in the logical framework? Are they relevant, measurable, do-able? Do they add up to a good project?

START LISTING THE INFORMATION NEEDED & HOW TO GET IT

To make these objectives happen, you will need to find out a certain amount of information from whichever community with whom you start working: start to lis this information.

GET THE INFORMATION YOU NEED ON YOUR DISTRICT

To decide where your project will be, you need information about your District. Your office is in the District Town. So are other government and NGO offices, and the Hospital. You can visit them and collect information. There is also knowledge within your NGO.

You want to know the local Government policy and plans regarding Watsan. You want maps with roads, rivers etc., positions of known villages and their ethnic groups, main livelihoods (cattle, agriculture), which areas are probably well-off and which are probably poor. You can find out about practices that might affect Watsan – for example if women cannot leave their houses alone. You can find out and perhaps visit any Watsan existing projects.

CONTINUE LISTING INFORMATION

Wherever you live, there must be many sources of information about the surrounding area. List them.

SELECT YOUR PROJECT SITE

First you decide on the characteristics of the villages where you will work: for example not more than three hours away in dry weather, reachable for 11 months a year – plus among the poorest in the district – plus not served by other NGOs or government services in the same field – plus although your NGO is mostly of ethnic group B, you will not choose Ethnic group B villages unless they are indicated by the other factors – plus your choice would be in line with the policy papers of the district government – plus your choice should allow you to ensure best practice.

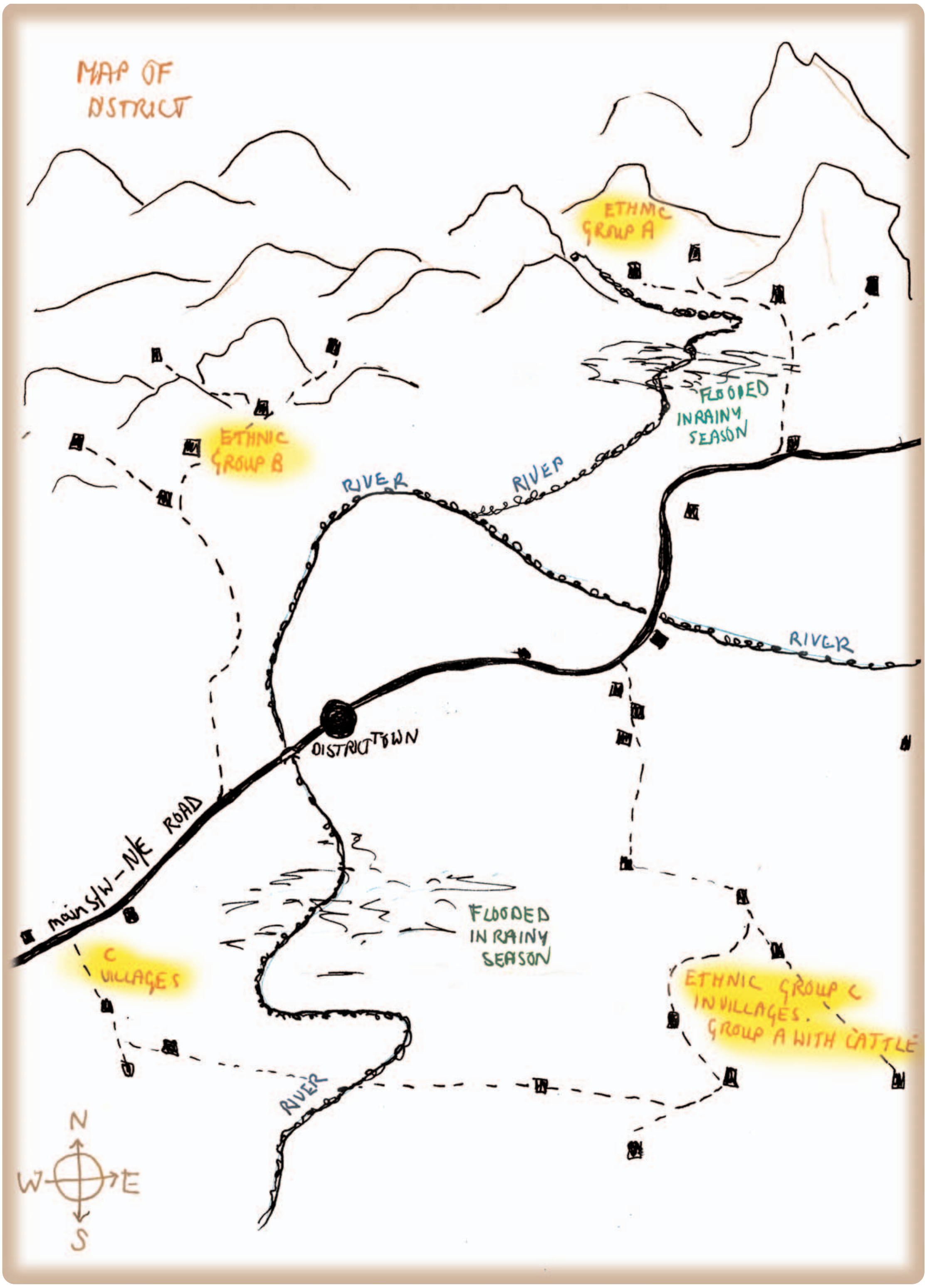
Only when such issues are agreed on, can specific villages be named. If names are suggested too early, you end up helping the village of the Governor's brother.

HOW WOULD YOU SELECT VILLAGES?

What do you think of these selection characteristics? Are there issues you would add or leave out?

PROJECT SITE SELECTED

After this you confirm you will help six villages (probably) near each other. Look at the map. The places that meet the agreed-on characteristics best are those in the North East (top right) Ethnic Group A, and those in the North West (top left) Ethnic group B. But the North East villages are difficult to reach and cut off for three months a year. This is your first independent project and you want to keep it manageable. So you decide you will work in the North West villages. It also means that language will be less of a problem. The villages in the North-West have populations of about 450 to 900.



GET THE INFORMATION THAT YOU NEED FROM YOUR BENEFICIARIES

STEP 1
CHOOSE THE BEST APPROACH

Read sections 3.2 *Possible Activities to Collect Information*, 3.3 *Participatory Needs Assessments*, 3.4 *Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs)* and 3.5 *Surveys*.

STEP 2
SELECT & TRAIN YOUR TEAM

Look at section 3.10 *Selecting & Training the Team*. The team might include colleagues from other organisations, from Government offices, or from other disciplines. As a Watsan NGO you need a Watsan engineer and you might decide to take someone along from Health.

STEP 3
SELECT THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

List the names of your NGO colleagues in a vertical column. Add the names of other people who might come. Now make another column listing the skills of each person next to their name. Now make a third list of the skills you need to go off and do a Needs Assessment or PRA. Can you find someone with each skill?

Only collect information that you will use.

STEP 4
SELECT & PREPARE THE TOOLS YOU WILL USE

When you looked at the Logical Framework you started a list of the information you want. Keep adding to it.

Read section 3.11 on *Questionnaires*, section 3.12 on *The Art of Interviewing* and section 3.13 on *Focus Group Discussions*.

DO THIS EXERCISE:
TALLYING & PERCENTAGES

These are skills that everyone should have. Tallying is a way or recording numbers quickly. Four upright strokes are crossed with a horizontal stroke to make 5. At the end the 5s can all be added up quickly. When you are all together, practicing skills, each of you do this exercise, tallying what you see:

Main colour of colleagues' clothing	
Black	~~IIII~~ III
Blue	~~IIII~~
Red	II
Brown	II
Green	
Other (specify)	III

What is the percentage of black clothing? ....%

DO THIS EXERCISE:
FORMS FOR RECORDING INFORMATION

Write down, translate, test and duplicate each questionnaire, the Information Sheets for each village, the forms for Focus Group Discussions, tally sheets etc. For each questionnaire there should be a sheet where the information is tallied and added up.

DO THIS EXERCISE:
WRITE A QUESTION

Write one question that you might use with a male householder. Discuss it with a colleague and improve it.

DO THIS EXERCISE:
PRACTICE USING A QUESTIONNAIRE

Print out the *Questionnaire* in section 3.11 and duplicate it. Print out the *Interviewing Checklist* in section 3.14 and duplicate it. Divide colleagues into groups of three. Now role-play: one of the three is a village woman, one is a female interviewer, one fills in the checklist. Continue until everyone has reached the desired standard.

STEP 5
PLAN YOUR SAMPLING

Read section 3.7 on *Samples.* You want some information on each village which you will put onto a Village Information sheet. So you will take a sample of what percent of villages?

STEP 6
PLAN HOW TO PROCESS THE INFORMATION

The six villages have populations of 450 to 900. Households have 5-6 people. You need to do some in-depth interviews with women. How many do you plan to do? Do you have the time?

STEP 7
ORGANISE THE TRIP

Before you go to the community have a plan of action, with people, transport, food etc all planned for. Have a budget. Someone in the team should be in charge and responsible for keeping the work going according to the plan. You also need a plan for using the results. Take food etc with you because you are visiting poor communities. One person should be in charge of catering.

STEP 8
USE THE FINDINGS OF YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO MODIFY YOUR PLAN

The Water Engineer who helped with the Needs Assessment said that wells could be dug in four of the villages. But in two, water would have to be piped from the nearest springs. The springs would have to be protected.

The main livelihood in the villages is from cattle. These are sold to purchase grain. Wild greens are collected in the bush to form part of the family meals. Many of the children are skinny and listless. The communities have land and skills to grow vegetables. However at the moment there is no water to spare. 80% of the men interviewed want priority given to drinking troughs for their cattle, the source of income. Areas around the unprotected springs show over-grazing and churned-up manure and mud. The first priority of women was extra water to grow vegetables, then health-related structures – latrines and bathing cubicles. The third priority was for washing slabs.

There was diarrhoea among the children. There was no strong habit of hand washing after defecation or before eating. Usually people use just water for hand washing – no soap or ash.

The team confirmed information that was mentioned by one of the NGO Workers: in the rural areas, with this ethnic group, different generations cannot use the same latrine. If a good latrine is built, it is used by granny and grandpa. The young mothers and children have to go to the bush. This is difficult for them during the night or if they are sick. They need a second latrine for each family.

STEP 9
MAKE A BUDGET – KNOW THE COST OF EACH ITEM

Costings are for materials plus workmen's salaries. The budget is in Yurr – the local currency.

1 water point (well plus pump or tap) – serving 200 people or 30-40 households		20 yurr
Protected spring – serving the same number		200yurr
Piping from spring to tap	"	40 yurr
Latrine footplate	"	3 yurr
Cattle trough	"	45 yurr
Shower cubicle	"	15 yurr
Clothes washing slab	"	15 yurr
Additional pump or tank + piping for veg. growing		100yurr
Hygiene Education: 6 month's salary @ 200 yurr/m. for consultant Hygiene Educator		1,200 yurr
Hygiene education materials		300 yurr
Needs Assessment/PRA: Cost of team + NGO engineer + nurse + Hygiene Educator (6) spending 3 days in villages + transport + food + per diems		250 yurr
Translator per day		3 yurr

CHOOSE YOUR PRIORITIES

Hygiene education is an essential part of the package. So is a ten percent contingency line. Because of local geography, up to one-third of the water sources will be protected springs plus piping. Is this essential? What items are priority for the NGO? Extra latrines? Cattle troughs? Extra water for vegetable growing? Shower cubicles or clothes washing slabs?

Remember that the international partner will only provide 8,000 yurr.

NOW, YOU CAN DRAW UP YOUR WATSAN BUDGET

STEP 10
FEED INFORMATION BACK TO DISTRICT

Make sure that copies of the Needs Assessment findings go to the Main offices at district level.

2.2 THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE OF THE PROJECT CYCLE

CHART YOUR PROGRESS THROUGH MONITORING

Why do you need to monitor? Because, once you start the work, you need to know how well your are doing with your plan. The key monitoring question is "Are you making good progress along the road you chose?"

BUILD IN PARTICIPATORY MONITORING

Some or most monitoring should be done with and by the community. They can help decide what to monitor, based on indicators that you have identified together. Just as in Participatory Needs Assessments, people who cannot read or write can still count, tally and keep records.

DECIDE ON YOUR INDICATORS

What are indicators? You can break down some of the objectives and activities into small representative targets or indicators. An indicator is something that points the way, or indicates. If the activities selected as indicators are carried out well, then probably other things are proceeding well also. Each indicator has to be measurable, achievable, and relevant.

Design tables in which you can record what you have monitored, like this one:

Village	1	2	3	4	5	6
End of month 6 (date..............): No. of water points installed: % of compounds with 1 latrine: % of compounds with 2 latrines:						
End of month 9 (date..............): No. of water points installed: % of compounds with 1 latrine: % of compounds with 2 latrines:						
End of month 12 (date..............): No. of water points installed: % of compounds with 1 latrine: % of compounds with 2 latrines:						

CHOOSE & DESIGN YOUR MONITORING TOOLS

Read section 3.8 on *Monitoring & Information Collection* where there are examples.

MAKE AN ACTION PLAN.
IF THE RESULTS OF MONITORING ARE NOT USED, YOU HAVE WASTED YOUR TIME.

The project needs a clear, big chart showing the different tasks, with a calendar, a timeframe stating when each activity should start and finish. Each task should have an assigned name beside it – the name of the person who has to carry out the task.

The plan will also show indicators. An example: the table should be filled in as the project creates basic village structures. The Action Plan can show what should be done with this information. The Pump Caretaker tool (in section 3.8) states this clearly. If information is gathered but does not reach the managers, or if managers do not use it, then time, money and effort will have been wasted.

DO THIS EXERCISE

In section 3.8 there is a table showing Community Participation indicators. Imagine it comes back to the NGO after the second visit. It shows that half the committee did not turn up to the last meeting, that women members were not allowed to speak and hardly any villagers came. What do you do?

FURTHER READING

The IRC in Delft, the Netherlands has a number of publications on Monitoring in Watsan – for example on Participatory Monitoring and Monitoring for Effectiveness.

"The Action Monitoring for Effectiveness approach focuses on decentralising responsibility for monitoring to those with a vested interest in change for the better. It aims to improve project effectiveness in the short term…" (source: www.irc.nl/page/1895)

2.3 THE EVALUATION STAGE OF THE PROJECT CYCLE

WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU NEED FOR AN EVALUATION?

Why do you need to monitor? Because, once you start the work, you need to know how well your are doing with your plan. With monitoring, you asked how far the project has come on the road it chose. With evaluation you ask the same question, but you also stand back and looks at the longer-term objectives. The key evaluation question asks: did the project take the right road? Has it really made a difference to the problems? In evaluation the yardsticks used are called criteria. Three of these are Relevance, Sustainability and Cost-effectiveness.

The involvement of the beneficiaries is essential. It cannot be just nice Talk. So you need to design a system of information collection with Participation built into it. You are interested in the “Official” point of view of the community chiefs and leaders. But you also want the unofficial view – of women, of the men when they are off duty, and of minorities. You need to create situations in which shy people can be frank, in which women can speak without being laughed at etc.

RELEVANCE

Relevance is perhaps the most important of the criteria. It questions whether the objectives of the project really matched the problems and needs – whether the 'why' of the project was a good one. It is easy to start activities that do not help the problem.

DO THIS EXERCISE

You are now involved in the evaluation of your project. Go back to the report from the Needs Assessment and list the main problems of the villages. Then look at the activities you chose to do, given the limitations of the budget. Were they the right choice, given the problems? Could your activities really have made a difference? What information would tell you whether they did?

SUSTAINABILITY

If you look at sustainability, you ask whether there are lasting benefits after the project ends. For example, have the villages maintained their water supply? Do they keep the latrines clean? Are they still washing their hands?

DO THIS EXERCISE

You come back to the villages after five years. What information would tell you if the project has had any sustainability?

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

This asks whether the project has been successful in achieving its objectives. Then, by adding the word "cost" it asks whether it has done so for a reasonable amount of money, time and effort.

FEED "LESSONS LEARNT" BACK INTO THE NGO

Your NGO wants to identify "Lessons Learnt" and feed them back into the organisation and into the next round of project planning. How would you organise this?

DO THIS EXERCISE

What else could you do with the information at the end of the project cycle? Ask yourself " could these results help another NGO to work better?" If the answer is "Yes," think about publication – or circulating the results through an umbrella organisation – or posting an account on a web site.

Part 3: Tools for information collection – with beneficiaries

3.1 TYPES OF INFORMATION YOU MIGHT WANT

TYPES OF INFORMATION DURING THE PROJECT CYCLE – PROCESS, DELIVERY & IMPACT INDICATORS

As the project progresses, you may want information that tells you about the process – how the project staff and the community are getting along for example. You may want to keep an eye on delivery – whether the project is delivering the pumps etc it planned for. And then, you may want to know about impact: has the project changed anything – are the cattle now fatter and selling for more? Are the women growing vegetables and feeding their children better?

QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE INFORMATION

Quantitative information can be counted. How many latrines? How much money in the Village Account? Qualitative information can be measured. It is less easy to collect and some people avoid it. For example you decide on the following as your participation indicators:

Participation indicators (filled in by Committee & NGO)

Village of Runo	Date	Date	Date
Water Committee meeting regularly?			
Female Committee members?			
Females talk & are listened to?			
% of villagers attending			

You note at each meeting the numbers of villagers attending, (quantitative data) and write it as a percentage, but you are really interested in whether the numbers stay the same or increase over time, whether people are staying interested – qualitative data.

INFORMATION CHECKLIST
BE SELECTIVE – COLLECT ONLY THE INFORMATION YOU WILL USE!

- The numbers, age and sex distribution of the beneficiaries; family/sizes; housing: where they live (e.g. in remote locations, among the main population, in shanty towns or refugee camps) and whether housing is adequate/inadequate; main sources of food and water
- Occupations, total family budgets and amounts going out for rent, food, water, schooling, health care: absent men? Incomers? Enough jobs? Underemployment? Access to credit for creating work? Dangerous or unhealthy occupations? Small industries? Resources used in the best way?
- Physical problems, illnesses, risk behaviour; use of alcohol, drugs, unprotected sex? For women: genital mutilation? age at marriage, history of pregnancies and birth risk factors, contraceptive use? Male/ female power within marriage?

- Children: nutrition? Vaccinations? Spacing between babies? General care? Chances for school? Differences between boys/girls? Choices for teenagers?
- What are the main problems for our beneficiaries? From the point of view of professionals? From their own point of view? What do normal people have that they don't have? What do they need that normal people don't?

3.2 POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES TO COLLECT INFORMATION

- Public meetings with chiefs and community leaders
- Meetings with groups of men and groups of women separately
- Less public meetings with key informants
- Focus group discussions (see below) with groups based on age, gender, ethnic background etc
- One-to-one interviews to collect information that is personal and difficult to talk about. You could use written questionnaires here, or ask questions and write up the answers afterwards
- Tallying by community members including the non-literate – numbers of houses, animals etc.
- Map-making of the village and its resources, including houses, pumps, roads etc; these maps can be made on the ground using sticks and stones. Distances can be measured by pacing them out
- Putting the problems of the community into a hierarchy, showing which they think is considered the most important.
- Measuring key dimensions: for example, the nutritional status of small children under five using Upper Arm Circumference Bands. If mothers do the measuring, the mothers see the problem
- A Village Calendar of activities during the year
- Charts of workloads, either seasonal or in general: groups can calculate the daily burden of work of both men and women
- Collecting opinions; most groups of beneficiaries, except babies and small children, can discuss problems and needs – children over seven, people with psychiatric problems, even people with special education needs/mentally disabled

3.3 PARTICIPATORY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

In a Participatory Needs Assessment, a group of outsiders work with a Group from a community to identify the main problems, wants, needs and Solutions. The "wants" can be different depending on who states them. They may not include serious problems because they are not noticed (like moderate childhood malnutrition) or embarrassing (like alcoholism). It is important to register the strengths of the community that can be used to identify and organise solutions.

3.4 PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISALS (PRAS)

A PRA is one way of doing a Needs Assessment. It is currently fashionable. The name is misleading because most of the activities are equally good for urban communities.

What makes it different from other kinds of surveys? The team may include colleagues of different but relevant disciplines. So if the main issue is income generation, the team can include people from agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, or micro-industries. A PRA may use a lot of Focus Group Discussions,

In the last few years PRAs have been used widely. Often, though they are used in the wrong way. One reason is that they raise the expectations of the communities but their findings are hardly ever used to change the plans of the organisation involved. Another reason – the process is fun, but can easily be done in a sloppy way. So the team accepts opinions and findings that are not good enough. And It is possible to miss important issues in the community because they are not easily talked about.

If you decide to do a PRA, be very tough with yourselves. Ask yourself at every step – can we believe this information? Are we collecting it as carefully as we could?

3.5 SURVEYS

A survey takes a wide look at, usually, one particular aspect of a community or culture. Most small NGOs have the capacity to do small surveys, for example a survey of the nutritional status of children in a village (upper-arm circumference). They probably do not have the capacity to do a big survey. If there is an area of particular interest to your organisation, check the sites of the relevant UN agencies. In a few cases they offer a whole package of research tools. But if you put a lot of time and effort into getting information, you need to be sure that the process is cost-effective.

3.6 SICKNESS SURVEYS

ACCURATE METHODS – BUT DIFFICULT

People working in Watsan often want to prove that their activities have made a difference to sickness, especially to diarrhoea in children. DO NOT START – it is too easy to do it wrong. Leave it to the professional researchers.

LESS ACCURATE – BUT DO-ABLE

You want to know what sicknesses are common at which time of year. You want to know about other kinds of health problems. You could do the following:

- Find a health worker to advise you
- You interview a sample of beneficiaries. You talk to the mother. People's memories are accurate for two weeks. So you ask who was sick during that period. You ask her to think about each member of the household in turn. You need to be very persistent and specific – "Now let's talk about your second child – think about the day before – are you sure? – what were the symptoms? – so none of them had diarrhoea? etc". And you should return every few months. You could also ask about serious illnesses in the last six months and physical disabilities. Ask to see the Road-to-Health Cards of children under five. Record whether each is a Protected Child (ask your health worker) and their nutritional status. Do an Upper Arm Circumference measurement. Look at any other medical records in the house.
- You could review the records at the nearest clinic to see the most common conditions
- You talk to other local health workers. You can discuss with them the conditions that are under-recorded or unrecorded. These might be malnutrition, physical and mental disability, HIV+ status.
- By now, it is hoped, you will have a fairly accurate idea of the health situation in your area.

3.7 SAMPLES

What is a sample? You want to look at a big group of – fields, children, cows. Looking at all of them will take too much time and effort. So you want to look at only some of them. The ones that you look at, must represent the whole group.

SAMPLE SIZE

What is the ideal sample size? This depends on what you want to know. If you have a new seed, which may or may not give more grain, then you cannot afford to get the results wrong. You would need a big, random sample – and if you are a small NGO you are probably not the organisation to carry out such a project. Talk to an expert.

EXAMPLE

Suppose you have an Advice Centre. And you are not getting enough visitors. Perhaps one problem is the hours that it is open. So you decide to find an independent researcher. They can interview visitors as they leave and whoever else they decide to talk to. The sample size could depend on:

- The amount of time you can afford to pay the researcher
- How often you get visitors from minority groups. If there is a group that never comes, the interviewer may need to go to their neighbourhood and find out why
- The number of responses you think is believable. Would you change the hours on the opinion of 5 people? 10? 30?
- What is the sample size you can analyse by hand? Do not depend on your computer to process your findings. It may break down at the worst possible time. So have a sample not bigger than 80.

100% SAMPLES

Suppose you notice that nine of the farmers in your district are getting much bigger crops than the others. You think it would be worth finding out why. There are so few farmers they you would want to interview all of them – a 100% sample.

RANDOM SAMPLES

A random sample is one where every possible person who could be part of it has an equal chance. This could be done by putting every name in a hat and pulling out the number of names that you want, or by selection from a list by a computer. But you need a random sample only if you are dealing with large numbers that will give results that are statistically significant. This level of research is not usually the job of a small NGO.

REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLES

At the level of small samples you do not need random samples to make good decisions! Representative samples are what you need. A representative sample is one where the smaller group – the sample – represents the larger by having the same important characteristics.

QUOTA SAMPLING

One way is quota sampling. With a quota sample you say, well, we can interview 80 people in such-and-such a district. You are only interested in the over-20s. Half of the sample should be male, half female. You will interview ethnic groups in proportion to their presence in the population – so half will be ethnic group A, one quarter each ethnic group B and C. About one-third of your sample will be urban and the rest rural. And then you go out and find individuals to match your sample.

CLUSTER SAMPLING

In a village of one hundred houses you might want to visit twenty. You decide you will visit five households in four clusters. For each you stand in the middle of the village and spin a bottle. The first cluster will be the nearest house to which the bottle points and four houses round it; the second will be the furthest house to which the bottle points and four houses round it; the third and fourth will in the middle. This gives you four clusters of five houses in different parts of the village.

3.8 MONITORING & INFORMATION COLLECTION

Every project needs to monitor – to check how well it is doing. Here are some aspects of monitoring to consider:

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Monitoring.

Evaluation.

Project Objectives.

If the project objectives include the big issues such as sustainability, and if monitoring is thorough and good, then an external evaluation at the end becomes less important. The project will have kept control of the process of judging their work.

PARTICIPATION BY THE COMMUNITY IN MONITORING

Most projects want **community participation**. If the community is involved in different aspects of the project, they are more likely to feel ownership and sustain the project long-term. However the process is not that easy. The community is informal, perhaps with an oral rather than written way of communication. There may be problems for project workers – the people who in the end have the power to make decisions. They are part of the formal sector. It can be hard work translating oral observations into a written report etc. There needs to be commitment from both sides

REPORTS

It is very important that the monitoring is written up into a **report** that outsiders can read and understand.

Read section 2.2 on monitoring activities.

EXAMPLES OF MONITORING TOOLS

FIRST EXAMPLE OF A MONITORING TOOL:

Village Structures (Indicators) in Place – date filled in by NGO

Village	1	2	3	4	5	6
Village Water Committee established						
Tariffs for water set & collectors chosen						
Bank Account opened						
Pump Attendants selected						
Pump Attendants trained						
Operation & Maintenance system in place						

SECOND EXAMPLE OF A MONITORING TOOL:

Pump Caretaker training

1 Objective
1.1 To make Caretakers competent in necessary skills
2 Activities
2.1 Preparation of training inputs
2.2 Agreement on who should be Caretakers
3 Indicators for the training inputs
3.1 Training materials are ready and good quality
3.2 Place and time of training agreed on for Caretakers
3.3 Everyone agreed on what they need to learn (a training needs assessment)
3.4 Everyone agreed on what they must be able to do at the end of training
3.5 Ways of checking their skills with checklists at the end of training and routinely afterwards
4 The route the information takes
4.1 The trainer reports on training and checklist results to project manager. Routine village-level monitoring uses checklists and reports to manager. Manager checks that standards are maintained and if necessary organises more training

EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY MONITORING:

The Water Committees decided to monitor whether the project Is helping the most vulnerable. The fear is that poor families or the elderly may not be able to construct a latrine pit and hut even if the footplate is free. And tours of each village by committee members confirm this. However the Committees are determined to organise people to give materials and labour to poor families in return for a set amount of free water.

3.9 INFORMATION COLLECTION WHEN RESOURCES ARE VERY LIMITED

Perhaps your NGO has very few resources – no money for transport. Perhaps you see information collection as something big and complicated. You think that it can only be done by an organisation with money and resources. This is not true.

Suppose you are based on a clinic in the slum areas of the district town. You want to start work more in prevention and education. You need to know about hygiene practices and beliefs. You can collect a lot of useful information. You decide to start talking to the people working in the slum so you free up some time for some personnel. Perhaps you decide that two nurses will do some information collection for one afternoon a week. They start by covering four blocks in the slum area, visiting individual houses, talking in cafes, asking individuals to invite their friends to Focus Group Discussions. A few evening visits would be necessary to talk to working men. The nurses count the number of people they talk to from each main ethnic group, the number of each type of worker. Gradually they build up a representative (quota) sample. The nurses discuss their findings as they work. So you and the NGO can now assess the patterns of need and the internal strengths of that slum. You can now make sensible decisions about new activities.

3.10 SELECTING & TRAINING THE TEAM

Look at your colleagues in your NGO and make an inventory of who can do what. You could ask members of the board or members of the local community.You need a team of one or two if you are working locally – about five for something like a PRA. The team members, between them, must have the following skills:

- Someone who can put a questionnaire together and train the others
- At least two people who can talk easily with the beneficiaries, understand their lives; at least one must be female; males & females who speak the beneficiaries' languages and/or translate
- Someone who understands figures – who can work out percentages and compare one to another and teach the others
- If you are working away, you need someone who will organise transport, sleeping and food. You should take the food you need with you.

In training the team:

TRAINING COLLEAGUES IN INFORMATION COLLECTION AND USE

- Encourage discussion about the information needed, and what the NGO will do with each answer etc.
- Improve basic skills in numbers, percentages, comparing proportions etc.
- Practice their interviewing skills until everyone is good enough; use the checklist (section 3.14). Put the interviewers into groups of three. One worker plays the role of community member. One worker carries out the interview using a questionnaire form. The third worker listens, watches and fills in the checklist. A successful interviewer will get at least eight ticks under "Yes"
- Practice on people similar to the beneficiaries, perhaps in the market or waiting area of the local clinic or hospital.
- Check attitudes – that everyone shows respect for the people they meet and interview.

DESIGNING GOOD QUESTIONNAIRES

3.11 QUESTIONNAIRES

To better understand this section, print out the example questionnaire at the end of this section.

A good questionnaire should not take longer than half an hour. It should have a few easy questions at the beginning to get things going in a friendly way. At the end there should be easy, friendly questions or discussions that leave the person interviewed feeling happy about the interview.

SENSITIVE ISSUES

Are you dealing with sensitive issues? Examples are money, politics, sex, intimate behaviour around menstruation or defecation. These questions should come about two-thirds of the way through, when the interviewee is more relaxed and ready to trust the interviewer. You can see that in the questionnaire that appears later in this section, the questions on defecation and health are placed in this position.

CONFIDENTIALITY

An issue related to sensitivity is confidentiality. Interviews that cover sensitive or difficult issues ("What do you think of the village Head?") may need to be confidential – that is, any information or opinion given should not be traceable to the interviewee. This can be done by not recording the response. It can be noted later with no name attached.

Or you could use a questionnaire form that does not have any place for the name or address to be filled in – and this form can be shown to the interviewee: "You see, your opinion cannot be traced back to you".

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

- Closed questions have a limited number of choices. In the questionnaire below, the first few questions are limited or "closed".

- Open questions allow for different kinds of answers. In the questionnaire that follows, for example, question 12 is open.
- In the questionnaire the interviewer also adds information from what s/he can see. If the interviewee says she washes her hands, but there is no water and the soap is quite dry… observation is more reliable than what is said.
- A question about a specific event is better than a general question; if you ask people "Do you always wash your hands before preparing food?" guess what most of them will answer. So in the questionnaire, the interviewee is asked if she washed her hands this morning, before she prepared food. Think how you yourself would answer with these different kinds of questions.

TRANSLATING AND TESTING A QUESTIONNAIRE

The words used in a questionnaire should be simple and understandable by village people. Write the questionnaire in the language you are going to use or have the questionnaire translated. Once you have translated the questionnaire into a second language, ask one of the interviewers to translate it back into the first language. Sort out any phrases where a muddle has crept in. Always test the questionnaire on someone with the same educational level as the people with whom you will be using it. This could be one of the NGO's drivers or cleaners. Check for any misunderstandings. There are always some.

DOUBLE-CHECKING ON THE INTERVIEWERS

In some cultures it is difficult to find interviewers who take the job seriously. They may just make up the results later. So look at their completed forms regularly. If someone had been faking the responses then the answers may not make sense or may follow a pattern. Follow up a few interviewees and go through the questionnaire again. You can warn the interviewers that their work will be checked.

QUESTIONNAIRE FORM FOR A WATSAN SURVEY

The questionnaire on the following pages is for interviewing housewives and should be done by a woman in the real situation. For practice, men can role-play being a woman. For Y/N responses, ring the correct answer. For others write the answer down.

Greet the respondent politely. Say the following or something similar: "We are hoping to assist this village with its water and sanitation needs – but we are not making any promises. You could help us by answering these questions. It will not take much time. But let us go where other people cannot hear what we say".

Question		Answer
1	The last time you collected water was this morning?	Y/N
	Yesterday?	Y/N
	Another time?	....
2	What container? Plastic jerrycan?	Y/N
	Clay pot?	Y/N
	Bucket?	Y/N
	Other?	....
3	Do you put anything into the container to stop the water sloshing? Can I see?	Y/N (note whether the object is clean)
4	Water Storage: can I see? Plastic jerrycan?	Y/N
	Clay pot?	Y/N
	Bucket?	Y/N
	Other?	....
5	When did you last clean this container?	....
	How? Container scrubbed and dried?	Y/N
	Container emptied and wiped?	Y/N
	Other?	....
6	When you last got water out of the container, how did you do it? Can you show me?	....
	Hands clean?	Y/N
	Hands enter water?	Y/N
	Dipper clean?	Y/N

Say the following or something similar: "I have to ask you some rather personal questions about your daily habits. I hope you don't mind. But it is between us two women – and any answer you give will not be linked to you in the future, I can promise".

Question		Answer
7	When did you last go and defaecate?	Morning/evening dark/light
	Where? Latrine?	Y/N
	Fields?	Y/N
	Bushes?	Y/N
8	After you defecated this morning, did you wash your anus?	Y/N
	And yesterday?	Y/N
	With what? Water?	Y/N
	Soap?	Y/N
	Earth	Y/N
	Leaves?	Y/N
	Other?	………………………………
9	After you defecated this morning did you wash your hands?	Y/N
	And yesterday?	Y/N
	Where? Can you show me?	Y/N
	Water available?	Y/N
	Soap? Ash?	Y/N Y/N
10	Before you prepared food this morning did you wash your hands?	Y/N
	And yesterday?	Y/N
	Where? Can you show me?	Y/N
	Water available?	Y/N
	Soap? Ash?	Y/N Y/N
11	What would you choose to have constructed first? Give numbers 1 to 5 in order of preference (ring response):	
	Pump in village	1 2 3 4 5
	Trough for watering animals	1 2 3 4 5
	Latrines by every courtyard	1 2 3 4 5
	Cubicles for showering	1 2 3 4 5
	Clothes-washing slabs by pump	1 2 3 4 5
	Other…………………………………………	………………………………
12	Any water system needs repairing and replacing with time. This costs money. Are you prepared to pay?	Y/N
	How would you prefer to pay? (ring response)	once a year once a month per bucket

Thank the interviewee for her help

3.12 THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

During an interview the interviewees give something that belongs to them. In return a good interviewer shows respect and patience, by manner, words and body language. At the end, the interviewee should be happy to be interviewed again.

Good interviewing is a skill that can be practiced and improved. And every interviewer needs to become familiar with the questionnaire and use it a few times in role-play.

An interview with a questionnaire has a set shape so it is called a structured interview. An alternative is to have an unstructured interview where the interviewer knows the area of interest to be discussed, but has no specific questions. Perhaps the issue is “What does this person think about the future role of our NGO?” The interviewer may still need some way of starting the discussion

With unstructured interviews, an interviewer may get information that was not expected. People may be more open because there is no pencil and paper forming a barrier. But unstructured interviews may also miss out important aspects (“How much money would you contribute to make this happen?”) and the findings tend to be more difficult to analyse – so less likely to influence decisions.

Sometimes a few unstructured interviews make a good starting point if you know little about the topic. They will provide an idea of what is important to the interviewees. After that, any questionnaire developed for structured interviews will be better. A few unstructured interviews will make sure that the point of view of the beneficiaries is in the interview design.

This section discusses interviews with individuals. Focus group discussions (see below) are a way of talking in structured or unstructured ways to a group of people.

3.13 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A Focus Group Discussion is a way of getting information and opinions from several people at once. The rough rules are:

- You know in advance what kind of information you want and from what group. So you gather people who belong to that group – street kids, the elderly, prostitutes. You may want two kinds of people so that they bounce ideas off each other.
- Groups can have between five and twenty people – enough for a discussion. If the group is any bigger, some people will say nothing.

- Groups need to feel relaxed and at ease when discussing. An NGO visited several villages in West Africa as part of a Health Needs Assessment. The official picture given by village heads emphasised infectious disease and hernias among the men. Focus groups held indoors with the women brought up other issues such as the high price of childbirth and alcoholism.

The advantages of Focus Group Discussions: they provide a lot of information quickly. The disadvantages of Focus Group Discussions: you may not be able to control who comes into the group. If the first person you talk to (street kid, prostitute) is from one particular ethnic group, then everyone else may be. So then you need to balance it by forming a second group from the other ethnic groups.

On a wider scale you need to think hard about how representative were the groups you talked to, and the opinions they expressed. Might they have said very different things if you had met one-to-one?

A FORM FOR A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Focus Group Discussion	**Place.................**	**Date.................**
Group tally:	**Ethnic group A:**	**Ethnic group B:**
"They say good water helps to keep you healthy. What do you people think?"	Cover personal hygiene	Daily showers? And if you can't?
Clean hands/food preparation Clean hands/defacation	Soap: Cost? Use? Ash? Use?	Children /diarrhoea

3.14 INTERVIEWING CHECKLIST

The form below can be used to monitor one-to-one interviews or Focus Group Discussions:

ENSURING THE QUALITY OF INTERVIEWING – A CHECKLIST

Did the interviewer do the following?	Yes	No
1 Greet the interviewee politely		
2 Use clear language		
3 Find a quiet place and ensure confidentiality		
4 Have good positioning and body language		
5 Ask good questions and listen well		
6 Show respect		
7 Fill in the form correctly & legibly		
8 Say goodbye nicely		

The interviewer should score all 8 "yes" before starting the job.