



# Qualitative Design Toolkit

Qualitative Methods for Monitoring  
Food Security Activities Funded by the  
USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance

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## ABOUT IDEAL

IDEAL is an activity funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) that works to support the United States Government's goal of improving food and nutrition security among the world's most vulnerable households and communities. IDEAL addresses knowledge and capacity gaps expressed by the food and nutrition security implementing community to support them in the design and implementation of effective emergency and non-emergency food security activities.

## ABOUT THIS VERSION

Initially published in early 2023, this document was revised in December 2023. The new toolkit includes several updates to the QulPS, new sections, and more tools.

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## Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DQA	Data Quality Assurance
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Table
IQR	Implementation Quality Review
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KII	Key Informant Interview
MCA	Multi-criteria Analysis
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSC	Most Significant Change
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
QM	Qualitative Monitoring
QS	Qualitative Study
QuIPS	Qualitative Inquiry Planning Sheet
R&I	Refine and Implement
RFSA	Resilience Food Security Activity
TOC	Theory of Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

## Introduction

Donors, like the United States Agency (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), and implementing partners rely on evidence collected through robust qualitative and quantitative methods to monitor and evaluate emergency and food security activities—for documentation, learning, decision-making, and adaptive management. While quantitative data enables programs to measure and track a range of indicators, they cannot tell the whole story.

Qualitative data are critical to contextualize and explain quantitative findings, to provide key insights into less quantifiable aspects of activity interventions, and to ensure we are asking the right questions in our quantitative work. Qualitative methods are crucial for developing context-appropriate quantitative indicators and conducting meaningful, formative research that informs effective intervention design. By engaging activity participants, qualitative methods of inquiry can also help ensure accountability to affected populations (AAP).

In USAID/BHA-supported emergency and non-emergency activities, qualitative data can be used to:

- capture meaningful and varied perspectives of activity participants and stakeholders to inform decision making, improve programming, and inform adaptive management;
- explore issues in conflict-sensitive programming, disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate adaptation, and resilience trajectories;
- monitor implementation processes such as behavior change sessions, food and non-food items distribution, and training events;
- explore changes in the protection environment and whether especially at-risk people (e.g., women and girls, older adults) feel safe/secure;
- identify regions with high rates of food insecurity and causes of high levels of mal- and undernutrition;
- study local responses to the effects of climate change shocks on agriculture and other livelihood strategies;
- explore recent patterns of water scarcity and availability of potable water, particularly how it affects human health and hygiene;
- assess progress towards activity objectives and explore underlying dynamics that contribute to outputs and outcomes and add meaning to statistical findings and patterns derived from quantitative surveys;
- identify synergies across interventions and inform context-specific strategies to sequence, layer, and integrate within and across emergency and non-emergency activities and identify linkages with other activities and investments beyond an activity's immediate implementation area;
- explore unintended consequences or unexpected outcomes that might be overlooked in routine quantitative monitoring; and
- complement quantitative data in providing participant explanations to phenomena/results we are not yet sure of the cause or effect.

## Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to support monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff from USAID/BHA-funded activities in designing and conducting rigorous qualitative inquiry to improve learning and implementation. It provides general guidance, steps for conducting qualitative inquiry, and practical tools M&E and program staff can use to conduct monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities through qualitative methods.

## How to Use this Toolkit

The steps to develop qualitative inquiries and gather and use qualitative information are broadly applicable across development and emergency activities, regardless of donor or sector. You will find examples throughout the toolkit to help design and implement rigorous qualitative inquiries in a diverse range of emergency and non-emergency activities.

The toolkit builds on the [USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance Technical Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for Resilience Food Security Activities V3.0](#) (May 2020, updated May 2023) and uses the USAID/BHA **Qualitative Inquiry Planning Sheet (QuIPS)**<sup>\*</sup> as a roadmap to guide the design of qualitative studies and communicate to stakeholders each step of the process. **In this toolkit, we use the term “qualitative inquiry”, which aligns with the USAID/BHA technical guidance. The guidance encourages two types of qualitative inquiries to better integrate qualitative work into an M&E system: routine qualitative monitoring (QM) and a stand-alone qualitative study (QS).**

This toolkit also aligns with and further elaborates on the “Qualitative Data Methods” in the [BHA Technical Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for Emergency Activities](#) (February 2022).

**The QuIPS is similar to a qualitative inquiry protocol.** The protocol documents all the steps the team will undertake to carry out a study or monitoring activity. The QuIPS distills the main components of a protocol and is sufficient to communicate the primary objectives, design, analysis, and intended use of a planned qualitative inquiry.

You will find references to the QuIPS tool throughout the toolkit, presented in [Annex 2](#). You can also find the QuIPS in [Annex V](#) of the USAID/BHA Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs) Technical Guidance document (mentioned above). The process and steps described in this toolkit are applicable across all activities (emergency, resilience, and others) and donors, whether you use the QuIPS or other planning documents. Implementing partners of USAID/BHA-funded RFSAs are encouraged to use the Technical Guidance, including the QuIPS, as a planning and communication tool for qualitative inquiry.

Learning involves doing. At each step, we provide examples from different technical areas, as well as activity phases to illustrate appropriate design and documentation and to help you consider ways to use qualitative inquiry in your work. You will also find questions, prompts, and spaces designed to help you design and document a qualitative study for your activity, or for ongoing qualitative monitoring.

Throughout the toolkit, you will find **core questions** to consider at each step of the design process. Each step also includes **application** exercises to help you design your study and complete the QuIPS.<sup>1</sup> You can complete the application questions in the [companion workbook](#). While you may work through this toolkit on your own, it is expected that you work alongside your team to complete the exercises.

Designing your qualitative inquiry—which could include a qualitative study or ongoing monitoring for an activity—and documenting it in the QuIPS is an iterative process. Completing some sections of the QuIPS will require you to review earlier sections and sometimes make changes as you consider new questions and implications. You and your team should expect to return to earlier decisions and remain open to revisions as you develop a thorough and well-designed inquiry.

<sup>\*</sup> Current USAID/BHA guidance uses an earlier iteration of the QuIPS.

<sup>1</sup> While the QuIPS toolkit is designed to be used mostly for RFSAs and multi-year emergency activities, much of it can be applied to emergency activities though some sections of the overall toolkit may be less applicable.



## Steps in Qualitative Inquiry

**As with any research endeavor, qualitative inquiry begins with intentional design, requiring a well-considered, step-by-step approach to solving a problem or answering a critical question.** Rigorous design leads to robust, evidence-based findings that can inform programming and policy decisions.

**The process begins with clearly articulating the purpose of the inquiry and the research questions. This framework then drives the selection of the sampling approach, data collection methods and tools, analysis, and how findings are communicated and used.**

**Validity** refers to the accuracy and trustworthiness of the methods, tools, data, and findings.

**Reliability** is the extent to which you get the same answer from more than one application of a study tool (i.e., repeatability).

There is no fixed process to follow when designing a qualitative inquiry. Rather, the design is guided by a set of core questions and intentional selection of methods and tools to ensure the **validity** and **reliability** of the inquiry, in relation to the purpose and research questions.

As you begin to plan and design your qualitative inquiry, first consider what it is you need to know and why. Answering these questions will tell you when in the life cycle of an activity and from whom you will need to collect data. You can use qualitative inquiry at any time during the life of an activity, though the design will vary somewhat with the objective and activity phase (see Table 1). Whether you are integrating qualitative inquiry into a monitoring and evaluation plan for a new activity or applying it in an ongoing activity, it is important to carefully select the appropriate purpose and methods for a given phase in the activity cycle.

Table 1. Qualitative inquiry throughout the life cycle of an activity

Activity Phase	Examples of Qualitative Inquiry Objectives
<b>Application</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess contextual conditions and target population needs.</li> <li>Test ideas and assumptions of the theory of change (TOC)/develop TOC, LogFrame, and indicators.</li> <li>Assess constraints to and opportunities for appropriate and integrated interventions and sustainability or exit strategies.</li> </ul>
<b>Start-up or Refine &amp; Implement (R&amp;I) Phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve knowledge of and evidence to support activity design.</li> <li>Refine the TOC.</li> <li>Engage participants and stakeholders to launch and refine interventions.</li> <li>Identify areas where there are gaps in knowledge that may affect long-term outcomes which warrant further inquiry.</li> <li>Define appropriate perception-based measures.</li> <li>Develop QuIPS to ensure the study or monitoring includes all phases of the process.</li> </ul>
<b>Baseline Study</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish baseline values<sup>2</sup> and targets for indicators whose quantitative value have limitations in helping you understand context (e.g., percent of communities declared as open defecation free).</li> <li>Contextualize and complement quantitative findings.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Some emergency activities will have zero values at baseline and rapid qualitative data can be used to update the overall conditions of the target activity/needs assessment.



Activity Phase	Examples of Qualitative Inquiry Objectives
<b>Routine, Annual, Post-Distribution, and other Monitoring Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess activity’s progress and challenges, uptake, benefits, and unanticipated results for adaptive management.</li> <li>• Monitor context, conflict sensitivity, and community participation, attitudes, and perceptions.</li> <li>• Assess communication and AAP feedback strategies and effectiveness.</li> <li>• Assess wait times, transaction costs, or safety issues as part of post-distribution monitoring or distribution monitoring.</li> </ul>
<b>Midterm Evaluation or Implementation Quality Review (IQR)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on implementation quality, sustainability, and systems/institutional strengthening.</li> <li>• Assess early outcomes of TOC to understand the underlying dynamics of promising results, and others that are not on track to be achieved.</li> <li>• Assess relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and other relevant evaluation criteria, such as cultural appropriateness, women’s empowerment, and gender issues, among others.</li> <li>• Determine participant perceptions of change and reported social or behavior change associated with the activity.</li> <li>• Revisit and refine qualitative inquiry objectives and conclude which findings have been useful for adaptive management.</li> </ul>
<b>Final Evaluation/ Interim Evaluation<sup>3</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextualize and complement quantitative findings, including participant perceptions of social or behavioral change associated with activity.</li> <li>• Assess TOC pathways.</li> <li>• Assess relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and other relevant evaluation criteria, such as cultural appropriateness, women’s empowerment, and gender issues, among others.</li> <li>• Assess sustainability of interventions, benefits (how, why, for whom), and crosscutting outcomes.</li> <li>• Inform possible cost extension, if applicable.</li> </ul>
<b>Lessons Learned/ Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify lessons learned and best practices.</li> <li>• Provide recommendations for possible future interventions/scale-up.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> For RFSA R&I activities, an interim evaluation is conducted in the fourth year to assess cost extensions for high-performing activities; if no cost extension is granted the interim evaluation serves as the final performance evaluation.

As you think through what you want to know, consider these two **core questions**:

## CORE QUESTIONS

1. **How is the inquiry linked to the award cycle and the M&E system?** Qualitative methods can be used throughout the life of the activity and for different M&E purposes. It is important to anticipate the types of qualitative inquiries that will best support the activity and then integrate these within the overall M&E system and activity cycle. This ensures that findings will be timely and can be used to inform implementation and decision making or be triangulated with quantitative data.
2. **Is the inquiry aligned with the theory of change (TOC)?** The TOC helps ensure the qualitative inquiry is focused on testing the pathways of change, logical coherence and feasibility of outcomes, and other underlying assumptions of the activity design.<sup>4</sup> The qualitative inquiry may uncover unexpected findings that can inform adjustments to an activity. Inquiry methods can also generate actionable evidence to refine the TOC, improve intervention design, and adaptively manage the activity.

As an example, let's consider that as part of applying for an activity award you want the most current and specific information possible regarding constraints to technology uptake in your target population; that is, what are the constraints that prevent—or make it very difficult—for men, women, youth, or other target groups in your proposed implementation area to adopt improved agricultural practices that your activity will promote, should it be awarded. Such information will help you design and target strategies to overcome those specific constraints, whether they are technical, financial, cultural, gender-based, among others. During the application phase, your qualitative inquiry is likely to include households who may not ultimately participate in your activity.

Alternatively, let's assume you are in the R&I phase of your activity (see Table 1) and did not conduct a qualitative inquiry as part of the application process. Conducting it during the R&I phase could provide the same information and be used to adapt interventions to address ongoing participant-perceived constraints and encourage adoption of improved practices. One of the benefits of conducting the inquiry at this stage is that your activity participants—or at least communities in which interventions will be implemented—have been identified. This helps narrow the sampling strategy to focus on activity participants, households, or communities (or similar communities where the activity is not implemented, as a point of comparison), or participants eligible for specific activities or with specific demographic characteristics or vulnerabilities.

You can use qualitative inquiry at any time during implementation to assess the process of change and how participants perceive this change. For example:

- You can use qualitative inquiry to assess what effects, if any, the activity is having on removing constraints to uptake identified in earlier inquiries, why or why not, and how.
- Your inquiry could delve deeper into why activity participants adopt some practices and not others. This type of inquiry is appropriate at the baseline, for example, when you want to document people's perceptions at the beginning of an activity. It is also valid during routine monitoring, the midterm, and the endline when you want to assess change and why it did or did not occur.

The following sections provide a sample process for designing a qualitative inquiry. It is intended to guide you through the progression of the primary steps, with the opportunity to explore the range of possibilities

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<sup>4</sup> Starr, L. (2019). *Theory of Change: Facilitator's Guide*. The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program.

for identifying goals, structuring your team, and defining the specific objectives and methods for conducting your inquiry.

## Pre-Design Work

### IDENTIFY EVIDENCE GAPS AND DRAFT IDEAS

Prior to designing your qualitative inquiry and communicating your plan in the QuIPS, first identify the evidence gap you need to address.

In this initial step, your research team will need to review existing activity data from the Indicator Performance Tracking Tables (IPTTs), LogFrame, TOC, Learning Agenda, and any recommendations or other monitoring data available from previous studies and project documentation. The team should also consult relevant publications and/or “gray literature” that may offer insights or hypotheses that are related to the ideas you are formulating around your inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

Before moving to Step 1, conduct a desk review to synthesize the documentation you consulted during this pre-design work phase, establish your research priorities, and determine where gaps exist and where more evidence is needed. [Annex 1](#) provides a checklist of suggested documents that can be used in your pre-design work to identify evidence gaps.

#### Review:

- ✓ Existing data from IPTTs and the LogFrame
- ✓ Activity reports and documentation (including those from other activities and programs)
- ✓ The TOC and revisit assumptions
- ✓ The Learning Agenda
- ✓ Relevant publications and gray literature

### IDENTIFY TEAMMATES AND STAKEHOLDERS

You’ll work with many different people throughout your qualitative inquiry, and they will generally fall into three broad categories:

- **Collaborators:** a small working team who can help you make choices about what you will study and how. Examples may include program staff with expertise in social protection, gender and inclusion, and/or other technical areas of inquiry such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), DRR, or livelihood diversification.
- **Reviewers:** a small group who can give you strategic, thoughtful feedback to refine, finalize, and ultimately approve your qualitative inquiry. Examples may include the research team lead, project/country M&E manager, and technical and research advisors, both internal and external to your organization.
- **Stakeholders:** those who have a vested interest in the results of your inquiry. Qualitative monitoring and reporting informs the learning and accountability interests of activity stakeholders at the national, regional, and corporate levels. Stakeholders may include donors, country offices, headquarters, executive boards, government partners and ministry offices, and regional administration and local government departments. Learning is also relevant for other partners including non-governmental and governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, humanitarian organizations, partner research institutions and universities, etc.

<sup>5</sup> [Gray literature](#) is information produced outside of traditional publishing channels, including government and non-governmental organizations. Examples include reports, working papers, concept notes, newsletters, and presentations.

Figure 1. Pre-work section of the QuIPS

QM/QS # [Insert title of qualitative monitoring or study inquiry]
<b>PRE-WORK</b>
<p><b>SOURCE DOCUMENTS and EVIDENCE GAPS</b></p> <p><b>Source Documents</b> (List any documents consulted in the desk review to identify evidence gaps):</p> <p><b>Evidence gap(s)</b> (List any evidence gaps identified):</p>
<p><b>TEAM and STAKEHOLDERS</b></p> <p><b>Collaborators:</b></p> <p><b>Reviewers:</b></p> <p><b>Stakeholders:</b></p>

If you are using the QuIPS (e.g., for USAID/BHA-funded RFSAs), you will start by entering the **Type (QM or QS) and Title** of your inquiry. Indicate whether you are doing **qualitative monitoring (QM)**, which involves an iterative process of ongoing qualitative inquiry over the course of an activity, or a **qualitative study (QS)**, which is conducted as a discrete study during a particular phase of the activity, e.g., baseline, midterm, or endline evaluations. Include the number and title exactly as they appear in your LogFrame. For example, the first qualitative monitoring inquiry in the LogFrame should be labeled “QM 1” in both the LogFrame and in the QuIPS.

### **APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 1 – Draft Ideas and Identify Team Members and Stakeholders**

First, write down your early draft ideas about what qualitative inquiry could add to your activity (i.e., what do you want to know and why). Also, which colleagues will you want to consult with as you design your qualitative inquiry? Consider those who work on relevant components of your activity. Make a list of internal team members who can provide critical insights as you design your qualitative inquiry.

Second, identify a small working team (your collaborators) who can help you make choices about what you will study and how. Then identify a small group who can give you strategic, thoughtful feedback to refine, finalize, and ultimately approve your qualitative inquiry (your reviewers).

Third, identify those with a vested interest in the results of your inquiry, namely, stakeholders and users of your study. (*See descriptions and examples above on page 6*)

## Step 1: Define the Purpose, Objectives, and Research Questions

Qualitative inquiry study questions focus on *why* and *how*, rather than the more quantitative aspects of *what* and *how much*.

Step 1 introduces what you will study, why and how. From this first section of the QuIPS, a donor or other reader should understand the evidence gap your inquiry intends to fill—a gap your team identified during the pre-work phase, described above. In other words, what type of inquiry do you plan to carry out and what is the purpose? This section of the QuIPs may reference documents you reviewed during your pre-design work.

In this step, you will identify the purpose and objective(s) of your qualitative inquiry and define your high-level guiding questions, drawing on your review of existing data. Figure 2 shows Section 1 of the QuIPS, which includes the purpose and objectives, question(s), and type(s) of data to be collected.

Figure 2. Section 1 of the QuIPS

SECTION 1: PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, and RESEARCH QUESTIONS
<p><b>Purpose:</b></p> <p><b>Objective(s):</b></p>
<p><b>Research / inquiry question(s):</b></p>
<p><b>Data type</b> (Process / Output / Outcome / Impact / Context / Crosscutting theme):</p>

The **purpose** is a broad statement that summarizes the goal of your qualitative work and establishes a foundation for it. In other words, the purpose is the reason *why* we are doing this research. You can summarize the purpose in your QuIPS like this:

*The purpose of this qualitative (monitoring or study) is to (understand, explore, describe) the (phenomenon of interest) of/for/among (activity participants, population of interest) at/in (study site).*

The **objective(s)** specify the intended outcomes. What do you intend to achieve through the study? There may be more than one objective. The purpose and objectives should also clearly describe how the information being collected will inform programming or decision making. You can summarize the objective(s) in your QuIPS like this:

*The objective(s) of the (monitoring or study) are to (assess, measure, identify, determine, discover) the (cause, reason for) the (phenomenon of interest) and (state the intended change).*

**What makes a good research question?**

- ✓ Specific
- ✓ Measurable
- ✓ Feasible
- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Timely
- ✓ Fills an evidence gap

The **research question(s)** (i.e., inquiry question) serves to focus and guide your design. Questions should be open-ended and informed by the purpose and objectives of the inquiry. This is **not** the list of questions for an interview or focus group; rather, it is the set of overarching summary questions that guide the overall inquiry and serve as the basis for developing interview questions.

If you find yourself generating a very long, detailed list of questions at this stage, pause to ask if you are in fact creating your data collection tools (e.g., topical outlines) rather than your broad questions. Consider your purpose and objectives and the high-level questions that most

directly support them. Typically, a qualitative inquiry will include two to three overall questions, and no more than five; you may include sub-questions for each primary question.

1. **Data type (Process / Output / Outcome / Impact / Context / Crosscutting theme):** Define the type(s) of data you will collect in terms of how it relates to your activity’s TOC, type(s) of expected results (e.g., output, outcome). These levels of inquiry, or data types, are not mutually exclusive, and a qualitative inquiry can address multiple levels of the TOC. Qualitative inquiries are particularly useful for understanding processes, contexts, and crosscutting themes. When conducting a qualitative inquiry, the type of study (e.g., baseline study, endline evaluation, routine monitoring) should also be stated, which in turn suggests when it will occur during the course of the activity.

**CORE QUESTION**

**Is the timing of the qualitative study or monitoring within the award cycle appropriate given the purpose?** For example, is the timing of the study such that the findings can be used to inform activity implementation (e.g., application, R&I, baseline, implementation quality) or for triangulating with quantitative data (e.g., baseline, midterm, endline). It is also important to consider events, holidays, or seasonal activities and weather that may affect the timing of the study, as well as how you plan to use the findings.

Below are examples adapted from two completed QuIPS. The first example is for a QM activity that would take place during routine monitoring of the activity (e.g., pre-/post-training, seasonally). It seeks to understand how to improve communication of information to activity participants, enhance their understanding of climate change, and ultimately increase their adoption of climate adaptation practices and technologies.

*Example 1. Section 1 of the QuIPS: Qualitative monitoring*

<b>Sample QM3: Implementation of Adaptations to Climate Change</b>
<b>SECTION 1: PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, and RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>
<p><b>Purpose:</b></p> <p>The routine qualitative monitoring inquiry will annually assess attitudes and changing practices around climate change adaptation strategies among communities participating in the activity. Anecdotal evidence provided by staff suggests that while farmers generally recognize that the weather has changed since their childhood, there is not widespread acceptance that climate change will continue in the future. The purpose of this qualitative monitoring is to understand decision-making dynamics among farmers and others associated with changing climate patterns and adoption of climate-sensitive practices, and how decision making changes over time.</p>

### Sample QM3: Implementation of Adaptations to Climate Change

#### Objectives:

The objectives of the qualitative monitoring activity are to:

1. Improve understanding of farmers' and other relevant actors' attitudes and practices related to climate change and climate-sensitive practices.
2. Inform the development of tailored climate adaptation communications strategies and agricultural trainings to promote awareness and understanding of climate change events and possible impacts on agricultural production and other potentially affected livelihood strategies.
3. Understand the drivers of change over the life of the activity in farmers' attitudes and adoption of climate-sensitive practices.

#### Research / inquiry question(s):

- How do community members perceive the concept of "climate change"?
  - How does this differ from their perceptions of systemic changes over time in the season length and timing of rainfall?
- Where do people get information about climate variability forecasts (not weather forecasts)?
  - What level of trust do they have in this information and its sources?
- Why do some community members reject the concept of climate change despite widespread acknowledgement that there have been recent changes in weather patterns, i.e., the seasons have been shorter and the rains have been coming later for more than 15 years?
- What changes, if any, are people taking in response to changes in climatic patterns?
- What, if anything, do community members think should be done to address predicted climate change impacts?

**Data type** (Process / Output / Outcome / Impact / Context / Crosscutting theme): Routine monitoring of outcome data.

Example 2 describes a qualitative study that would be conducted as part of an endline evaluation, the findings of which would provide more detail about how the activity has influenced men's and women's farm practices and differences in crop yields. The study could also provide relevant information for designing future activities involving female farmers.

*Example 2. Section 1 of the QuIPS: Qualitative study*

### Sample QS1: Comparative Study of Agricultural Yields Produced by Male and Female Farmers

#### SECTION 1: PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, and RESEARCH QUESTIONS

##### Purpose:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to provide insights into why maize crop yields are higher among male farmer participants compared to female farmer participants, despite roughly equal application of improved farming practices across female and male farmer participants. The first farmer survey showed that maize yields were significantly higher among male farmers compared to female farmers, even though both men and women were applying at least three key improved practices.



**Sample QS1: Comparative Study of Agricultural Yields Produced by Male and Female Farmers****Objectives:**

This qualitative study will: (a) improve understanding of which practices are being consistently applied by female and male farmers; (b) provide insight into external factors that may be contributing to low yields for women farmers, such as less access to high quality seeds; and (c) inform the redesign of the agriculture interventions of the activity to improve crop yields for women.

**Research / Inquiry question(s):**

- Why were crop yields lower among female farmer participants compared to male farmer participants?
  - Which practices are female farmers applying and why? Which practices are male farmers applying and why?
- What other factors may account for low crop yields for female farmers (e.g., plot size/proximity, crop composition, soil quality, soil type/crop, water access, specific weather conditions in parcel locations, erosion, technical assistance, labor organization/constraints, market inputs/market access, financial services, etc.)?

**Data type** (Process / Output / Outcome / Impact / Context / Crosscutting theme): Endline outcome.

**APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 2 – Draft Purpose and Objectives, then Validate**

Draft the purpose and objectives of your study. Note that you will need some sort of TOC, even if only in rough outline format. Expect to work iteratively with your team, for example, across two or three meetings over a few days, allowing time for reflection between meetings. Once you have formulated the draft purpose and objectives, consider the following questions to validate the draft purpose and objectives of your study:

- Do the objectives align with the described purpose?
- Are there any gaps between the purpose and the research questions? If so, what are they and what additional questions should be added?
- Given the stated purpose and objectives, can the goals be met by the current questions?
- Does the data type(s) align with the purpose and objectives?
- Do the purpose and objectives suggest additional data types not currently documented?

Ask your review team for questions and feedback at this stage to ensure you have a solid foundation before continuing to the next steps. Then fill out Section 1 of the QIIPS (shown in Figure 2) using your newly developed inquiry purpose and objective.

## APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 3 – Draft Research Questions

Next you will draft your research questions. Research questions should help us fill our knowledge gaps. You may draw on both anecdotal information as well as the quantitative data or data from secondary sources to develop research questions. A general good rule of thumb is to use three key, higher-level questions with additional related sub-questions as appropriate. Fill in the next section of the QuIPS (shown in Figure 2) using your newly drafted research questions.

### What makes a good research question?

#### Research Qs should be:

- High-level and limited in number.
- Focused on a specific issue.
- Researchable/knowable.
- Build on what you already know:
  - Implicit knowledge from experience or from IPTT data.
- Will produce actionable information.
- Realistic, able to do within reasonable time, practical, and feasible.
- Timely and appropriate for activity cycle.

#### Good qualitative research Qs often start with:

- How does...
- Why do...
- Under what conditions does...
- The extent to which participants feel X...
- How satisfied are participants with intervention activities?
- What barriers are participants continuing to face?

## Step 2: Describe the Design and Methodology

This next section of the QuIPS (Figure 3) leads us into the study design and methodology. Note, as you draft each step of the QuIPS, you will need to refer to earlier sections repeatedly throughout the process to create a cohesive, well-designed qualitative inquiry.

There are as many design options for qualitative inquiry as there are questions! The important point is that the design and methodology are driven by your research questions, objectives, and data needs (i.e., type of data) as you have defined them in Step 1. For example, qualitative methods may be used as: (a) a stand-alone qualitative design; (b) as part of an iterative quantitative-qualitative design, where qualitative findings inform quantitative data collection and/or investigate the dynamics that underlie quantitative findings; or (c) as part of a simultaneous mixed-methods approach (see the box on “Planning for Data Integration When Using Mixed Methods”). When used together, findings from each method can be triangulated to verify and add depth to the overall findings. If you propose to triangulate qualitative and quantitative data, then the research questions and timing of the qualitative inquiry depend, in large part, on the questions and timing of the quantitative component.

Figure 3. Section 2 of the QuIPS

SECTION 2: DESIGN and METHODOLOGY
<p><b>Data source(s) and inquiry methods:</b></p>
<p><b>Sampling strategy and selection criteria:</b></p>
<p><b>Data collection tools:</b></p>

### DATA SOURCE(S) AND INQUIRY METHODS

The data source refers to where and from whom the study team will target its data collection and collect information. The data source could include, for example, secondary documentation, activity staff and participants, or stakeholders from partner institutions.

Examples of qualitative inquiry methods include focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), case studies, and multi-criteria analysis (MCA). More participatory/interactive methods include seasonal calendars, community mapping, and wealth ranking, among others. The section on “Data Collection Tools” below and the supplemental guidance in [Annex 4](#), “A Selection of Qualitative Methods and Tools”, provide more detailed information on various methods that may be used to collect qualitative data.

Here is an example of data source(s) and inquiry methods used in a QuIPS:

“This qualitative study will begin with a desk review of program documents to inform the design of the qualitative data collection plan. The data collection plan will incorporate the perspectives of program staff (MEAL staff, program staff *inter alia*), program participants (including men, women, male and female youth), and relevant key informants in the program area. Data collection will be carried out with FGDs and KIIs at multiple levels (e.g., community participants and relevant institutional actors and stakeholders). The study team will identify positive deviants<sup>6</sup> throughout the data collection process and interviewed to gain insights on relevant themes such as the successful adoption of improved agricultural practices.”

Remember, the choice for a particular method will depend on the purpose and objectives of the inquiry, defined in Step 1, as well as factors such as timing and resources.

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<sup>6</sup> Positive deviants are individuals who have better outcomes than others in the same situation, with the same set of conditions and resources.

## Four Common Methods in Qualitative Research

### Direct Observation

- Conducted at a location where activity occurs, (e.g., nearby infrastructure or service delivery sites, farm plots, water points, food distribution points, or agroecological resources). Critical to capture context and triangulate narrative interviews.
- Provides first-hand observation of topic of interest, as opposed to narrative perspectives from individual interviews or group discussions in which participants rely on memory.
- Direct observation can be difficult to conduct in locations that are crowded, where multiple activities occur simultaneously, or where the presence of the observer may affect interactions.
- Does not provide insights into *why* people choose to do or not do something. Emotions and opinions remain unobserved.

### FGDs

- Best suited to elicit diverse range of experience or perceptions, efficiently and cost-effectively.
- Best done when comprised of small groups (6–10 respondents), separated by (or inclusive of) gender, age, or type of group (e.g., farmers groups, youth group, savings group, water committee, etc.), and knowledgeable of the topic.
- Use FGDs to better understand the depth of an issue. The wide range of responses provide better understanding of a particular question or set of questions.
- Initial FGDs conducted early in a study can identify emergent themes, contextually relevant terms or examples, or types of people to target for more in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys.
- Facilitation and notetaking skills are critical to capture narrative responses from all participants and record group dynamics.

### KIIs

- Key informants are experts. Thus, researchers use KIIs when they can engage participants with unique knowledge of a particular topic, those who can give an opinion based on their expertise and experience in relation to the topic of interest.
- Key informants are not truly representative of a population. They are knowledgeable, but that knowledge may not translate well to other groups in the same community. Thus, triangulation is key.
- KIIs should be conducted in a private setting, facilitating discussion of sensitive topics. Privacy and confidentiality of interviews enable key informants to be comfortable enough to give their personal views rather than just an official position, thus minimizing potential bias.

### Case Study

- Case studies are based on in-depth interviews to better understand an individual's experience, any barriers and impacts of intervention activities, and present specific examples that represent the experience of a broader category of informant or community.
- Interviews should take place in a private space to ensure confidentiality.
- Allow for focused discussion on potentially sensitive subjects.

## Planning for Data Integration When Using Mixed Methods

A mixed-methods study integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as information from secondary data sources. It is often used for baseline and endline studies as an effective approach to achieve both depth (e.g., rich, contextual insights) and breadth (e.g., statistical generalizability). A common challenge of mixed-methods designs is ensuring that the qualitative and quantitative analyses are indeed complementary and fully integrated, rather than parallel or disconnected studies. To integrate the quantitative and qualitative inquiry:

1. Engage in joint quantitative and qualitative team discussions about the activity's TOC, the study purpose, and study questions.
2. Arrive at consensus on the causal chains that influence the achievement of objectives (intended domains of change).
3. Draw on the expertise of team members to bridge methodologies.
4. Integrate qualitative and quantitative sampling strategies, align instruments, and analysis.
5. During training, hold joint sessions of qualitative researchers and quantitative enumerators, where appropriate, to ensure common understanding of inquiry objectives, operational context, and core questions.

In this section, you will begin to describe *how* you will conduct the inquiry described in Step 1. Consider, for example:

- How and when will data be collected to provide critical insights related to the inquiry objectives?
- Which methodologies are best suited to the research questions, i.e., which method(s) will be used to address each of the study questions?
- Who will provide the data and what is their relationship to the activity (e.g., female farmers in activity producer groups)?

This last bullet point leads us to the following discussion on sampling strategies. Here we consider which criteria to use to appropriately sample the population of interest, i.e., those who will provide the information needed for the inquiry.

### SAMPLING STRATEGY AND SELECTION CRITERIA

The sampling strategy defines the characteristics of individual or household-level respondents you plan to include in the qualitative inquiry. The qualitative sample should be tailored to the purpose of the inquiry, the research questions, and methodology. While you identified the general data source(s) in Step 1 (i.e., sample pastoralist households), it is not necessary to collect data from everyone in the group of interest (e.g., *all* pastoralist households) or across the entire operational area of an activity. Rather, a sample (i.e., subset) of the total population under study is selected. For example, a qualitative study may collect data from women participating in VSLAs but would not necessarily include *all* women participating in VSLAs. The subgroup of the overall population of interest is your sample.

### Qualitative Sampling Techniques

*For qualitative studies, sampling is critical.* It typically involves **purposely selecting participants** to ensure collection of thorough, detailed information that helps explain the phenomenon of interest. Validity in qualitative inquiry is reached by uncovering the worldview and experience of a range of diverse respondents. In qualitative studies, the sampling approach is tailored to the research question and is *not*

intended to represent the whole population, as in [probabilistic sampling approaches for quantitative data collection](#), but rather to represent the *varied views* of the population.

Reaching **saturation** is an important indicator that a sample size is adequate for the phenomenon being studied. Saturation is the point in qualitative inquiry when there is enough data to answer the question and no new information or themes are emerging from sampled participants; in other words, it is when you begin to hear the same responses come up repeatedly with no new themes emerging.

Non-probability techniques are used to gain deeper insights, **recognizing that some informants are “more knowledgeable” about the subject of interest** or represent different lived experiences than others—nuance and insight which would be lost in randomized sampling. The most common non-probability approaches to selecting a sample are **purposive** and **convenience** sampling.

**Purposive sampling:**<sup>7</sup> Purposive sampling involves identifying one or more specific, predefined group(s) that the inquiry seeks to understand. For instance, if the inquiry seeks to understand the benefit of constructing a new road planned as part of an activity, the team may want to interview people in communities who live near the planned road and those who live far from the road. This approach can be particularly useful when the inquiry needs to reach a target sample quickly and sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern. For robust qualitative inquiry, purposive sampling should be undertaken in a thoughtful, systematic, and transparent manner, with a specific set of criteria (discussed below) to guide participant selection.

These are some more common purposive sampling approaches relevant to USAID/BHA-funded activities:<sup>8, 9</sup>

- *Heterogeneity sampling* aims to capture themes that cut across many experiences. Common patterns that emerge from greatly varied cases<sup>10</sup> may be core to the experience of participants and across implementation.
- *Homogeneity sampling* aims to develop a deep understanding from a particular subgroup in depth. This may be particularly relevant when process monitoring vulnerable populations.
- *Positive/negative deviant case sampling* involves selecting cases that are either notable successes or failures as extreme cases can generate rich information.
- *Typical case sampling* gathers information from average cases, i.e., those that are neither extreme nor unique. Selecting typical cases will require information from knowledgeable informants such as front-line staff who can identify typical participants or households.
- *Critical case sampling* identifies a case where a lot of information could be generated on an activity’s effectiveness because the case is unique in some way, like a community that is particularly resistant to interventions, or is extremely difficult to reach. Garnering insights from successes (or failures) in a critical case may allow the activity team to learn and apply lessons more broadly.
- *Snowball sampling, when done thoughtfully*, can be a purposive sampling technique (as opposed to convenience sampling, which USAID/BHA does not recommend). This approach identifies knowledgeable informants by seeking references from key informants for others to interview. Initially recommendations tend to diverge, but after asking for enough recommendations, a converging group of expert informants is likely to emerge.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from: TOPS. (2015). Lesson 2.3 Qualitative Sampling and Fieldwork Logistics. April. Prepared by TANGO International for TOPS and FSN Network with the support of USAID.

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

<sup>9</sup> USAID/BHA. (2023). *Technical Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for Resilience Food Security Activities*.

<sup>10</sup> The term “cases” refers to the unit of analysis for the QS or QM and may consist of individuals, households, communities, or specific cohorts/classes of participants, for example.

- *Criterion sampling* selects cases using predetermined criteria to identify informants who could provide information on system weaknesses for improvement. This approach can be coupled with quantitative monitoring efforts, for example, whereby activity participants that had a certain critical response to a questionnaire would be targeted for follow-up, in-depth qualitative interviews.
- *Stratified purposeful sampling* occurs within another sampling technique and may be used to ensure some variation in experience is accounted for. For example, within heterogeneity sampling, the team should sample two or three subsets of cases, such as households with low, medium, and high uptake of a specific practice promoted by an intervention.

**Convenience sampling** is not recommended for qualitative monitoring as it is considered “neither purposeful nor strategic.”<sup>11</sup> Convenience sampling is only applicable when it is not feasible to identify the sample or population or in settings with a great deal of population mobility or insecurity, such as in non-permissive environments or conflict settings. Findings from qualitative data collected with **convenience sampling are considered anecdotal** and may not fully reflect the experiences of participant groups of interest. Thus, it is **important to document such limitations and use caution** in applying findings for program implementation.

### Selection Criteria

Next, you will describe your selection criteria as part of your sampling strategy. The selection criteria identify the unit(s) of interest and ensure adequate depth and coverage across all levels of analysis. There is no formula for determining sample size. Rather, the team members establish a set of criteria that specifically addresses the questions and captures a desirable (and feasible) range of variation across the operating context.

The unit of interest is the building block of a data set and equates to the participants in the study—an individual, household, group or cluster, or some other predefined entity. Some studies often involve multiple levels of inquiry (e.g., resilience studies: household, community, institution) and therefore require multiple units of interest.

**The following steps offer an example of one way to construct a purposive sample, identify units of interest, and establish selection criteria:**

1. **Define the target community/village/area:** This step is similar to determining the “sampling frame”, the population from which participants will be selected. A qualitative sampling frame is typically defined by a geographic area, such as a community within the activity’s operational area, or by a participant listing.
2. **Identify inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample:** Next identify the characteristics of individuals, households, or sites to include in (or exclude from) the sample. In most cases, you will want to identify a few complementary selection criteria to ensure your sample supports several research questions. For instance, an inquiry about the impact of drought on food security would define “small-scale farmers” as a selection criterion; it may also include “female-headed households” to inform analysis of constraints for vulnerable groups. Extra effort should be made to reach at least some remote or difficult-to-access communities, whenever possible, though the numbers may be limited. When reaching very remote communities is not possible due to time, access, and/or resource constraints, then it is important to document these limitations in the QuIPS.

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<sup>11</sup> Palinkas L., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2013). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and policy in mental health* 42(10).1007/s10488-013-0528-y.



3. **Determine the sample size:** The sample size is guided by the methods you will use (e.g., FGDs, KIIs) and the criteria defined in the previous step. There is no need to select a number that is statistically representative of the entire population. Aim for **saturation**, which is the (anticipated) point when interviewing more people no longer results in novel information about the topic under study. In general, **the depth of data is generally more important than the number of interviews.**<sup>12, 13, 14</sup> Ultimately, the sample size will be determined, in large part, by available resources (i.e., time, budget) and the practicality of fieldwork logistics. Note, it is possible to reach saturation prematurely, if, for example, the sampling frame is too narrow (the people interviewed have too similar perspectives/experience), the methods are not eliciting rich information, or the team cannot attain more than surface-level information.<sup>15</sup>
4. **Select the targeted number of sampling units:** The final step is to select the individuals (or other sampling units, such as households) to participate in the inquiry. Create a plan to recruit and select individuals that satisfy the selection criteria and meet the proposed sample size. Then formulate a plan for enlisting participants. This can often be facilitated through discussion with community leaders and implementing partners.

As an example, an inquiry exploring the types of vocational training that strengthen resilience capacities among youth might include individual youth involved in vocational training and income generating activities; youth groups engaged in vocational training and collective savings activities; or institutional representatives, such as a ministry of youth development or appropriate development partners.

Next, we choose a sample that reflects the range of variation (e.g., selection criteria) across the population of interest. In this example, the criteria might include participation in specific training activities, duration or intensity of training, integration with other project interventions (e.g., savings groups, value chains), or male or female youth.

### CORE QUESTION

Does the **sampling strategy** capture the necessary range of variability in the population to adequately address the research questions? Have you clearly defined the sampling criteria? Will the sampling strategy enable robust analysis of the categories of interest? Is your sample size large enough to achieve a minimum level of saturation?

### APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 4 – Draft Sampling Strategy and Selection Criteria

Draft your sampling strategy and selection criteria. Note any questions you would like to discuss with your working and review teams or add them as comments on your QuIPS. Include the target community (-ies), inclusion and exclusion criteria, and proposed sample size. When you are ready, document the sampling strategy in your QuIPS.

<sup>12</sup> See: Turner, D. (2016). [Reaching saturation point in qualitative research](#). Quirkos Blog.

<sup>13</sup> Guest, G., Namey, E., & McKenna, K. (2017). [How Many Focus Groups Are Enough? Building an Evidence Base for Nonprobability Sample Sizes](#). *Field Methods*, 29(1), 3-22.

<sup>14</sup> Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). [How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability](#). *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). [Qualitative Research Guidelines](#). Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

## DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Although you previously identified general methods (e.g., KIIs, FGDs, site visits) at the beginning of Step 2, here you will specify the qualitative tools you will use—such as tailored topical outlines, among others—and describe how they will be customized for your purpose, research questions and methods, data sources, sampling strategy, and selection criteria. Refer back to those notes in your QulPS as you consider your options.

The relevance and quality of data collected through qualitative inquiry depends on the tools you use to conduct the inquiry and the skill with which they are implemented. Qualitative inquiry often uses more than one tool to collect the same information, which allows for triangulating data collected in different ways.

Qualitative data collection tools can be divided into two broad categories: interview tools and interactive tools, noting that all qualitative inquiry is intended to be a dynamic interaction among researchers and participants in the study.<sup>16</sup> Interview tools can be used for FGDs, KIIs, case studies, and MCA. Interactive tools can be used to create a Venn diagram, seasonal calendar, community map, and wealth ranking, among others. [Annex 4](#) provides more detailed information and guidance for each method.

**Interview tools**, such as for KIIs and FGDs, typically involve a **topical outline**, which is a list of questions or specific points of interest used to help focus and guide the conversation on relevant themes. Topical outlines can be used for KIIs and FGDs, though the questions will vary by method. You might not use the same topical outline when conducting a KII and an FGD even if the topic of conversation is similar. Developing topical outlines prior to fieldwork is therefore critical to guide interviews and interactive discussions, and to maintain consistency across events and areas.

Topical outlines should be **tailored** to sector-specific issues (e.g., governance and community participation, women's empowerment, nutrition) and different categories of respondents (e.g., gender disaggregated activity participant groups, livelihood groups, institutional partners, and technical experts).

Qualitative interviewers draw on topical outlines to facilitate discussions with specific focus groups or individual interviews. **The topical outline is not an exhaustive list or rigid script that must be followed, like a household questionnaire.** Interviewers must be intimately familiar with the topical outline to facilitate spontaneous lines of questioning or navigate a focused conversation relevant to the expertise of the group or key informant and the questions.

Developing the topical outline is critical to effective qualitative inquiry. Lines of inquiry or specific questions must be communicated in a way that captures the intended information—but remember, *this is not a script*; rather the topical outline is used to guide a purposeful conversation.

The first step to develop the topical outline is to identify specific topics (e.g., livelihoods, food security, market structures, WASH practices, organizational capacity) that are directly relevant to the broader research questions. These topical areas can be broad enough to incorporate a range of relevant questions, sub-questions, and responses. As an example, common topical areas addressed in qualitative inquiry for USAID/BHA activities include:

- factors influencing adoption of promoted activities;
- factors influencing household access to food, water, shelter, income, health services, agricultural inputs/markets;

<sup>16</sup> World Food Programme. (2014). *Choosing Methods and Tools for Data Collection. Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines*. United Nations.

- range and effectiveness of household coping mechanisms in times of shocks and stress;
- important community institutions and sources of informal social support;
- extent and nature of community participation in the activity;
- differences in benefits or results based on gender, age, ethnicity, disability, or other social distinctions or vulnerabilities;
- perceived benefits or consequences of activity services;
- challenges or constraints to participation in activity interventions;
- who is benefiting from the activity services, how, and why;
- differences in benefits or results based on gender, age, ethnicity, disability, or other social distinctions or vulnerabilities;
- necessary conditions for improved DRR, food, and livelihood security; and
- innovative and/or promising practices.

Once you establish the general topics, the next step is to generate more specific sub-topics or potential questions for the topical outline. Individual questions should be open-ended and designed to stimulate discussion and provide insight into underlying attitudes, beliefs, and opinions, for example through follow-up questioning, or probing. Review the phrasing or wording of questions to avoid using binary (yes/no) questions.

**Interactive tools** depend less on structured or semi-structured interviews and more on direct and facilitated input from participants to develop, for example, a Venn diagram, seasonal calendar, or community map, or to conduct a wealth ranking, etc. These techniques also require developing a core set of topics (i.e., topical outline) to guide facilitators, focus the activity, and ensure consistent data collection across sample sites and/or over time.

Choosing which technique or tools to use for a qualitative inquiry depends, again, on what you are trying to understand, how and when data will be collected, and availability of resources. For example, Venn diagrams are a quick and simple way to understand the various organizations providing services within a community—as well as their relationships with each other—and often increase engagement among individuals who might not otherwise engage in an FGD. Interactive and participatory tools (e.g., community maps) are often a good way to start a conversation with a group of qualitative inquiry participants.

See the supplemental guidance in [Annex 4](#) for further description of qualitative interviewing approaches, processes and limitations, and examples of interactive data collection tools.

When developing specific tools and topical outlines for a mixed-methods study, take care to avoid redundancy with questions that can or will be asked through quantitative inquiry. In this case, the intention of the qualitative inquiry is to complement and augment the quantitative findings, to explain the *why* or *how* of quantitative results. (See examples of questions from topical outlines used in USAID/BHA-supported evaluations in Annex 5.)

Each member of the qualitative inquiry team should participate in the review and refinement of topical outlines and tools to ensure questions are appropriately framed and the tool addresses all relevant topics (based on the indicators of interest). In addition, each member should also have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the activity context, interventions, and their objectives to enable them to *adapt* questions, when needed, or add follow-up questions without losing sight of the overall research questions and objectives.

In all, employing a mix of different data sources and techniques (e.g., FGDs and Venn diagram) gives greater depth to the information collected and is more methodologically sound, particularly when the

sample size is limited. Typically, the team would aim to use a mix of interview and discussion techniques, diagrams and mapping, and direct observation.

## CORE QUESTION

**How and to whom will you ask questions designed to answer your objectives?** For example, will a community mapping exercise with a group of diverse community members or a case study with positive deviants be better suited to answer your research questions?

Below is an example of an inquiry's design and methodology. The inquiry seeks to understand the differences in resilience capacities and wellbeing outcomes among different target communities, including internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities in rural, urban, and peri-urban areas.

*Example 3. Section 2 of the QuIPS*

<b>SECTION 2: DESIGN and METHODOLOGY</b>
<p><b>Data sources(s) and inquiry methods:</b></p> <p>Separate FGDs will be held for men and women, with groups of five to eight people in each focus group. Qualitative researchers may also conduct FGDs with separate groups of men and women from different ethnic groups, clans, and communities to help to determine how gender and cultural roles and norms influence absorptive, adaptive, and transformative resilience capacities in different contexts.</p> <p>Topical outlines for both FGDs and KIIs may change slightly for each round, based on review of the previous round's data. As such, the research teams will be better able to tailor questions for each round to probe in more detail about changes over time (e.g., seasons).</p> <p>People interviewed for the community-level FGDs and KIIs will be from the same communities, but not included in the quantitative data collection survey.</p> <p><b>Sampling strategy and selection criteria:</b></p> <p>The sampling will be purposive and adapted to focus on identifying and surveying respondents who can provide insight into program interventions. While purposive sampling may introduce some selection bias, the mixed-methods approach allows for the triangulation of qualitative findings with statistically representative data from the quantitative study.</p> <p>Research leads will select 12 sample communities from the same areas where the quantitative study will be carried out to best contextualize and triangulate quantitative findings, but sampled participants will not include the same households and individuals interviewed in the quantitative sample to avoid participant burden and allow for triangulation of data points.</p> <p>The selection of communities from the quantitative sample will be based on the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Displacement dynamics: The sample will include a range of displacement settings, including IDPs living host communities, camps, and returnees.</li> <li>2. Urbanization: Sample communities will include a mix of rural, relatively isolated sites, and urban/peri-urban sites to assess potential differences in service provision and uptake across these geographic categories.</li> <li>3. Agroecological and livelihood characteristics: The sample will ensure a mix of communities in highland farming areas and lowland areas where pastoral livelihoods are predominant.</li> </ol>

## SECTION 2: DESIGN and METHODOLOGY

The next stage of sampling is recruiting individuals from each of the 12 selected communities to participate in FGDs and KIIs. Sampled participants will be purposively selected to reflect the range of targeted program participants, including: smallholder farmers, livestock producers, members of agricultural cooperatives, market agents, input providers, financial service providers, agro-processors, participants in conflict-sensitivity training, micro/small/medium-sized enterprise owners (MSME), government officials, and community leaders and village agents, including women and youth, and program staff.

At least two FGDs will be conducted in each of the 12 selected communities, and participants for FGDs will be selected for gender balance, with at least half of FGDs targeted toward women. Youth will also be included as a target population for micro-enterprise interventions. KIIs will be conducted at the community and market-systems levels and will also be gender balanced to the best extent possible.

### Data collection tools:

Researchers will collect data using topical outlines designed to complement, contextualize, and interpret findings from the simultaneous quantitative monitoring questionnaire. Focus group facilitators will be guided by the topical outline but will be flexible in the structure of interviews to allow group participants to discuss primary knowledge domains with respect to the study questions.

### APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 5 – Document Data Sources

1. Document your data source(s) and your current ideas about research methods in the QuIPS. Review what you have already documented for purpose, objectives, questions, and data type to determine the sampling strategy, selection criteria, and research methods that are appropriate for your purpose. You may also want to review the commonly used qualitative methods described in [Annex 4](#).
2. List the tools you intend to use with each unit of interest to best capture the information needed to answer your research questions. Add these data collection tools to your QuIPS.

### APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 6 – Determine Broad Topics and Develop Interview Tools

After reviewing the sample topical outline questions provided in [Annex 5](#), determine the broad topics of your qualitative inquiry. Develop a set of questions for your topical outline given each subject area. A good topical outline interview guide should include questions that are:

- open-ended in nature (that can't be answered with a simple yes/no response);
- narrative rather than enumerative;
- organized thematically and in the order in which they are likely to proceed;
- appropriate and use neutral or non-direct language that is sensitive to the audience; and
- limited in number, being careful to avoid redundancy, and always refer back to the research questions.

### Step 3: Implementation Plan

The implementation plan for your qualitative inquiry describes how and when you will collect the data. The data collection tools you selected and developed in the previous section will influence the process, resources, and timeline needed to implement the inquiry process. In this section, you will outline how you intend to use those tools to gather qualitative data. The implementation plan should also include the number of days required to train field data collectors and complete data collection, which must align with the budget.

Some qualitative inquiries—such as a case study or formative research—may rely solely on qualitative data collection, and your implementation plan will describe those steps. Other approaches and objectives require the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. In these instances, your implementation plan should identify the sequence of data collection steps and relevant intersections among the data collected (e.g., complete qualitative FGDs to inform creation of questions for quantitative survey). Keep in mind that effective mixed-methods inquiries integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches from start to finish.

Note that for data collection in a mixed-methods study, the qualitative teams (the number and composition of which may be informed by the sampling strategy) collect data separately from quantitative enumerators and typically from different people (to reduce respondent burden) but may work in the same areas at the same time. In this case, the local survey firm or activity field staff work with target communities in advance of the team's arrival to identify participants for focus groups or key informant interviews based on the sampling plan and selection criteria. You may also identify other key informants during the course of qualitative fieldwork, especially as you find gaps in information or specific people with particularly rich insights.

Figure 4. Section 3 of the QulPS

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
<p><b>Study team composition:</b></p>
<p><b>Frequency and timing:</b></p>
<p><b>Training requirements:</b></p>
<p><b>Data recording, data management, and quality assurance:</b></p>
<p><b>Implementation timeline:</b></p>

**Data collection:** As a general guideline, each qualitative sub-team should include one facilitator and one notetaker (i.e., two-person sub-team) and will typically be able to conduct two to four interviews in a single day (e.g., up to two focus groups plus up to two in-depth individual interviews, depending on field logistics and team composition).

**Data entry:** After 1 to 2 days of fieldwork, the team should allocate an equal amount of time to enter data and collectively review findings. This is critical for preliminary analysis, which occurs during data collection

and is an important part of the process. The team constantly reviews and analyzes information as it is collected to iteratively build knowledge in relation to the questions—a key principle of qualitative inquiry. As understanding increases, emerging issues, data gaps, and unexpected findings come more clearly into focus. Subsequently, the team refines and adapts the methods and tools in real-time, to fill gaps or follow lines of inquiry that have emerged during data collection. Data entry days also allow team leaders time to review data for richness and completeness, and if necessary, to follow up with specific probes in the community before leaving the study area.

## FREQUENCY AND TIMING

Once you have outlined your implementation plan, make the timing and frequency of data collection align with the activity cycle, throughout the life of the activity. For example, depending on the questions and objectives, your inquiry may be a single, one-off exercise to collect primary contextual data (e.g., formative research at activity start-up) or an effort to understand change over time (e.g., part of a panel or impact study at endline); the timing of the inquiry steps and activities need to align accordingly. Qualitative monitoring may also be included in the overall M&E system as a component of a routine monitoring plan, such that the data collection tools would be implemented repeatedly in the same study areas over time (e.g., bimonthly, annually).

Several timing factors may influence your data collection efforts as well. Be sure to consider how the inquiry fits into the activity programming and monitoring cycle. For example, if the inquiry is intended to inform revisions to the TOC, plan to carry out all data collection, analysis, and reporting activities in advance of the TOC workshop. It is also important to anticipate seasonal events that affect data collection (e.g., harvest periods, pre-harvest hunger periods, rainy seasons that impede access to study sites) and special events (e.g., holidays, elections)—plan accordingly to ensure access to and availability of participants. Timing must also be appropriate to the questions. For panel studies, for example, it is important to ensure that the timing of any follow-on inquiry aligns with the timing of all previous data collection events (e.g., the baseline and endline at the same time of year).

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<sup>17</sup> A Gantt chart is a type of bar chart that illustrates a project's schedule and shows the interdependence between activities.



## APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 7 – Draft Implementation Plan

Draft your implementation plan using a timeline structure. Outline which data collection tools will be used, by whom, and for which individuals and/or groups. Your implementation plan should also factor in training days for researchers prior to fieldwork as well as to time to complete data collection. Be sure to build in adequate days for data entry and review (ideally every third day if budget allows). Consider logistical factors such as travel time, access to power sources, security concerns, and time for communication (among team members, team leaders). Make sure your implementation plan aligns with the budget and includes built-in contingencies for weather challenges, illness of staff, etc.

The implementation plan can be included in the QuIPS, using a table and/or Gantt<sup>17</sup> chart that provides information to guide implementation for each step of the inquiry, including:

- inquiry activity
- date/duration
- location
- data collection tools
- team lead
- other contributing team members
- other remarks or notes

The Frequency and Timing section of the QuIPS may also include a budget if this is useful to the team and/or requested by BHA.

## TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

**Qualitative tip:** Invest in adequate training time. Plan 3–5 days for qualitative team training, depending on the experience of the inquiry team. Also consider time needed for an effective pilot test and team debrief to refine the tools and improve implementation of data collection.

For qualitative inquiry, training is a critical component. Allocate adequate time for team members to thoroughly reflect on, understand and engage with the research questions, selection criteria, tools, data collection processes and the development or emergency activity (e.g., TOC, intervention sets). Team members will need this background to be able to adapt and make informed decisions in the field in consultation with team leaders (e.g., substitutions of key informants, unforeseen logistical constraints). The nature of the training may differ relative to the background and experience of the researchers who will conduct the qualitative inquiry and whether they will carry out a one-off study (QS) or conduct routine qualitative monitoring (QM) throughout the course of the activity.

The qualitative training is typically conducted in-country immediately prior to data collection, and close to the inquiry site(s), if possible. Note, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated some changes in how trainings were conducted, i.e., some were conducted online due to logistical challenges. This has led to better use of technology and created opportunities for remote or hybrid training approaches. That said, in-person trainings provide the best setting to prepare for qualitative inquiry and should be prioritized whenever possible.

During training, be sure to include adequate time to organize and carry out a field-test for all qualitative researchers to practice FGDs and, if possible, KIIs. This is an important step to ensure the team is comfortable with the tools and navigating data collection. Be sure to schedule a session to debrief after the field-test to reflect on the process and discuss possible revisions to the topical outlines. This also presents an opportunity to practice data entry and the data management protocol.

Topics to address during training include:

- expectations for team conduct and ethical considerations;
- the activity purpose, interventions, and TOC;
- objectives of the inquiry, research questions, and themes (e.g., resilience, gender equity);
- qualitative inquiry plan, methods, and tools (as described in the QuIPS);
- pilot testing and reflection;
- data recording, management, and analysis;
- team member roles and responsibilities; and
- logistics, movement plans, and security protocol.

**Minimum skillsets for qualitative team members:** Qualitative teams should be gender-balanced, multidisciplinary, and may include a mix of international and national consultants or local researchers with knowledge of the technical and geographic areas. Recruiting and training qualitative team members requires careful attention and review. At a minimum, team members should demonstrate:

1. The ability to establish rapport with respondents and ensure that the interview is a positive, respectful, and mutually beneficial exchange.
2. Inquisitiveness, active listening skills, and the inclination to ask probing questions.
3. Group facilitation skills, since information will likely be collected in part through focus groups or other group activities. This involves the ability to manage dominant personalities, encourage participation from all group members, and a keen sense of timing and ability to facilitate flow of the discussion.
4. Exceptional observational and notetaking skills, to capture verbal and nonverbal as well as contextual information. At the end of the day, the data set will consist of the notes, physical products (e.g., community map), or in some cases, a transcript of the data collection event. Maps and transcripts are no substitute for the observations and notes of a skilled researcher.
5. The ability to make quick decisions to facilitate a dynamic and focused interview or discussion. Since the topical outline is a guide for an inquiry activity, not a questionnaire, the team must be able to quickly tailor the outline to draw out the expertise of the respondent(s) and adjust the flow of inquiry to maximize data collection.
6. Analytical skills and the ability to apply contextual and operational knowledge.
7. Language and cultural competency skills appropriate for the specific study sites.

## DATA ENTRY, DATA MANAGEMENT, AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

You might be inclined to gloss over data entry and data management quickly, but these are essential components of qualitative inquiry to be thoughtfully considered and planned for during the design phase. Typically, qualitative design and training emphasize data collection methods and tools (e.g., how to conduct a quality FGD), but note taking and data entry are critical skills. Research teams carry out preliminary analysis during the data entry phase, as noted above. Moreover, without a clear system to manage, review, and store data established at the onset, an inquiry with even the richest data set may falter.

This section of the QulPS provides a place to establish your system for quality assurance, data recording, and data management throughout the data collection process. As part of your iterative process, plan to circle back to the sections of the QulPS on:

- training, to include components and adequate time for educating staff on the expectations and system for data recording, data management, and quality assurance; and
- implementation, to plan for the steps needed to record, manage, and ensure data quality.

Ideally, teams collect qualitative data in pairs to allow one member of a team to facilitate and the other to take detailed notes. These notes are often recorded by hand in notebooks or tablets during data collection and soon after transferred to matrices or qualitative software. You may choose to set up a data entry matrix template in Word file format for data collection, which can be easily migrated to a spreadsheet format for data analysis, discussed below.

[Annex 6](#) provides examples of simple **qualitative data entry matrices** that are divided by thematic categories. Data entry practice sessions and validation exercises with researchers are helpful to set standards and practice skills for data entry before starting data collection.

Some benefits of using simple data entry matrices that outline key categories of inquiry, such as the one presented in [Annex 6](#), include:

- ensures qualitative teams are consistently collecting and recording findings across sites and data collection events, but does not require transcription from recordings;
- encourages concise recording of detailed data according to important themes;
- creates space for researchers to include notes—distinct from notes that capture the group discussion or interview—on their observations and insights related to the context and group dynamic;
- facilitates iterative preliminary data analysis during team debrief sessions to identify patterns, information gaps, and key lines of inquiry; and
- helps team members identify unanticipated findings (during manual review and synthesis of matrices).

Note, even if you make audio recordings of interviews and focus groups, handwritten notes capture what a recording cannot, such as visual cues or observations of the context and the group dynamic. Always take notes with the expectation that an audio file is damaged/deleted—remember, the audio file is the backup. Audio recordings can be useful to double check quotations and verify notes but are not a substitute for handwritten or digital notes. If transcription and translation of notes or recordings are outsourced, a quality assurance mechanism should be set up to check the alignment of handwritten notes with the recordings. Field notes from direct observations should also be included.

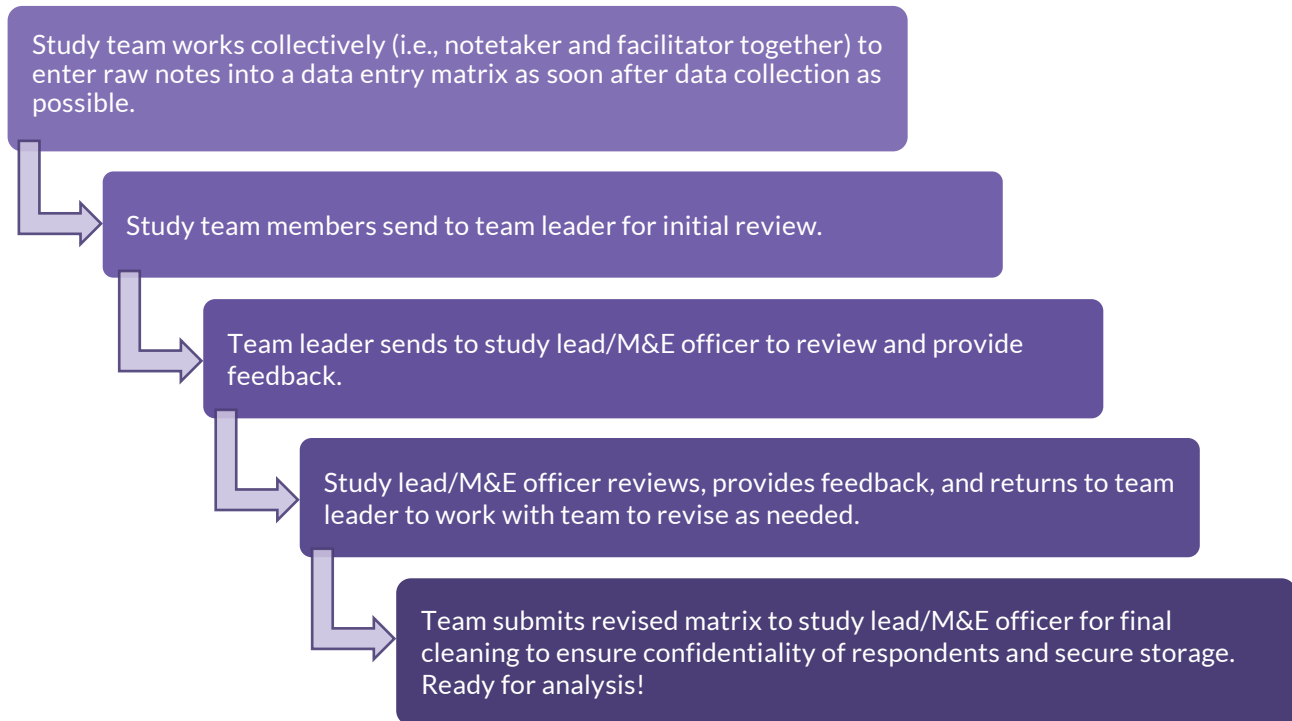
Save and back up all written and audio data files using a secure system and common file naming structure. Then transmit the files to the team leaders with the files anonymized<sup>18</sup> and encrypted (as possible) to safeguard participant confidentiality and protect personal identity information. Team leaders should review notes for accuracy and completeness before analysis begins. This may require going back to the data collection and entry team for clarification or elaboration—time that must be factored into the timeline.

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<sup>18</sup> The *BHA Technical Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting* provides the following instructions: “Note-takers will use a unique ID code system to record the location and identity of study participants, such that their identify will be recorded in a separate, secure tracker in Comm Care and field notes and observations will only include participant IDs and no other unique identifiers or personally identifiable data.” The *BHA Emergency M&E Guidance* also addresses this issue specifically in section 4.5 Data Management and Safeguarding.

Figure 5 illustrates a process that can be used to accomplish this, with the inclusion of checks by M&E officers. The important point is that the data management process includes the appropriate steps, allowing for some flexibility in the process given various data entry methods and field challenges that may occur. Setting up a data management structure in advance, with explicit attention to data review and quality assurance, is critical to the analysis process.

Figure 5. Data management and quality assurance: Example of a data entry matrix pathway



**Data quality and bias:** Ensuring data quality is an imperative that runs through every aspect of the inquiry design, data collection, data recording and management, analysis, and reporting. In other words, **data quality assurance does not begin after data collection ends.** Throughout the entire process, it is crucial to be aware of the subjectivity and the contextual or socio-cultural assumptions that may be embedded in the inquiry design and implementation—from how the questions are conceptualized and how the data is collected, to the inferences drawn from the results of the analysis. Qualitative by definition embraces subjectivity, because the team member is an actor in the data collection experience and interpretation of meaning derived from the data.<sup>19</sup> By recognizing this subjectivity, the qualitative team can begin to address or mitigate the effects of bias.

The qualitative team should be aware of and offset bias at every step. **Offsetting bias** means the qualitative team constantly seeks to identify possible sources of error and bias and to determine how they influence findings. The goal of qualitative inquiry is to understand the world from the perspective of the respondent. Bias can enter the equation at any number of points: from the inquiry objectives to the design of interview questions, to the interviewer, to who is and is not selected for participation, and to the interpretation of collected data.

Common threats to data quality and credibility include:

- incomplete or ambiguous inquiry definitions;

<sup>19</sup> Cook, H., Fox, K., and Peek, N. (2017). *Qualitative Methods in Food for Peace Monitoring and Evaluation* [Presentation]. USAID/BHA Annual Monitoring Workshop, Washington, D.C.

- inadequately trained and/or unskilled team members;
- poorly constructed or poorly worded data collection tools;
- poor sampling strategy;
- inquiry team or respondent fatigue;
- rushed data collection;
- inadequate time for data entry;
- extended recall period;
- poor/incomplete field notes;
- rushed analysis;
- distrust among team and respondents;
- lack of attention to implicit bias;
- lack of internal checks during data collection, data entry, and analysis; and
- inappropriate extrapolation or attribution.

The M&E plans for all RFSA awardees and the Monitoring Approach for Emergency Activities must include a Data Quality Assurance (DQA) section to describe how the data will meet the five key attributes of high quality described below. In addition, internal DQA will periodically test the rigor and effectiveness of these processes. These attributes relate to qualitative data as:<sup>20</sup>

- **Validity:** Validity in qualitative inquiry considers the “appropriateness” of the tools, processes, and data. Whether the research question is valid for the desired outcome, the choice of methodology is appropriate for answering the research question, the design is valid for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis is appropriate, and finally the results and conclusions are valid for the sample and context.<sup>21</sup>
- **Reliability:** Maintenance of a “decision trail” in the data collection process; ensuring an independent researcher could arrive at comparable findings from the data set, given the same set of research questions and intended use of the data (consistency, neutrality, comparability).
- **Timeliness:** Data collection is timed to complement and triangulate quantitative data appropriately, to inform decisions, or ad hoc as needed.
- **Precision:** Consideration of the depth of knowledge and whether findings can apply to other contexts, settings, or groups; disaggregation of key findings as appropriate.
- **Integrity:** Safeguards and procedures are in place for consent, translation issues, and cultural appropriateness.

**Training and DQA:** Both the general concepts and the inquiry-specific processes for ensuring data quality need to be included and emphasized in the training for all members of the qualitative team. The training sets the standard for complete and detailed notetaking that is free of interpretation or other bias by the team members. The training needs to allow time to practice interview techniques, exchange peer feedback on how to frame questions in ways that do not bias the respondent, and how to document important

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<sup>20</sup> Adapted from: USAID/FFP. (2018). *Qualitative Methods and Data in the FFP DFSA Cycle* [Presentation]. FFP Annual Monitoring Workshop.

<sup>21</sup> Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 4(3), 324–27.

contextual elements such as dissenting or silent voices. If the team will use recording devices, it is important to practice effectively using this technology to facilitate a comfortable environment for all.

It is crucial to allow time in the field for team leads to provide real-time feedback and instruction to ensure data quality. For instance, 1 extra day may be scheduled in the first community or institution the team visits to allow additional time for reflection and feedback before moving on to complete the remaining fieldwork. Team leaders should continue to observe the qualitative data collection for the duration of the fieldwork and data entry to facilitate reflection and advise on adjustments.

Team leaders should schedule daily debriefs with the qualitative team members—for instance, reviewing the notes and discussing key findings together at the end of each day of data collection, if possible (or after 2 to 3 days, depending on field logistics and budget), as part of the iterative data collection and analysis process. Note, feedback and guidance are best offered during the debrief session and *not* during the data collection event.

Debriefs can also be done through remote communication (e.g., Zoom, WhatsApp) to bring team members together if they are working simultaneously in different areas. Emergent key findings, along with any adjustments or issues that come up in the fieldwork, should be communicated regularly to team leaders and other stakeholders, such as project coordinators or lead consultants. [Annex 7](#) provides a sample guide for a Daily Debrief with data collection teams. The Daily Debrief template is a tool to help guide team discussions to improve the process for the next day of data collection and better ensure DQA.

Below is an example of an implementation plan for a sample inquiry. It details the study team composition; frequency and timing; training requirements; data recording, data management, and quality assurance; DQA; and implementation timeline.

*Example 4. Section 3 of the QuIPS*

<b>SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN</b>
<p><b>Study team composition:</b> The qualitative research team will be gender-balanced and multidisciplinary, with demonstrated experience and competence in qualitative data collection. The team composition will include the following core team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team Lead</li> <li>• Field Coordinator/Trainer</li> <li>• Field Researchers – Interview Facilitators x 4 (2 male, 2 female)</li> <li>• Field Researchers – Notetakers x 4 (2 male, 2 female)</li> <li>• Data Analyst/Data Quality Assurance (DQA) Manager</li> </ul> <p><b>Frequency and timing:</b></p> <p>Qualitative data collection will be concurrent with quantitative data collection. Although separate from the quantitative data collection teams, the qualitative teams will work in a subset of the same communities and avoid conducting their work in any place at the same time as the quantitative teams to avoid respondent fatigue. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews will take place on an annual basis.</p> <p><b>Training requirements:</b></p> <p>The field coordinator will oversee the qualitative monitoring and train the facilitators, notetakers, and field staff who will be collecting data prior to their participation in data collection activities.</p>

### SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

**Field coordinator training:** Will include four 1-hour Zoom sessions.

**Topics to cover:**

- Basic principles of qualitative data, data collection methods, data entry and data collection
- Overview of program, TOC, research questions, and review of tools
- Review Qualitative Researcher Training Manual and data collection protocol

**Field researcher training:**

- 5 days in-person, conducted by the field coordinator/trainer
- Basic principles of qualitative data, data collection methods, data entry and data collection
- Overview of program, TOC, research questions, and review and refinement of tools
- Mock interviews and data entry practice Review Qualitative Researcher Training Manual and data collection protocol
- Pilot test and finalization of tools and data management protocol
- Logistics, team member roles and responsibilities, movement plan, safety and security protocol, and distribution of materials

**Additional topics to cover:**

- Data collection priorities
- Subtleties, nuances, capturing complete answers
- Facilitation and notetaking skills
- Quality of transcripts
- Ethics, respect, and safety of all study participants
- Wording or translation issues to be resolved to maximize accuracy/meaning, comprehension
- Data protection and encryption
- Confusing language, field-level concerns (gender, local customs, accessibility, etc.)

**Data recording, data management, and quality assurance:**

**Recording:**

- Audio recording of sessions using recorders
- Notetakers should be directly entering their handwritten notes into the digitized data entry tool on site.
- Digital audio recording and photograph permission forms are developed and used throughout sessions.
- Attendance sheets will be developed and used throughout sessions.

**Data Management:**

- Acquired audio recording and photograph permission from participants.
- Audio records are directly uploaded to the organization's dedicated and protected server for archiving and revisiting purposes.

**SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

- Researchers will write up interviews using specially designed Data Entry forms. This is also a crucial phase, as narrative data forms the bedrock of the research activity and it is vital that data is communicated effectively to the analysts who will code, analyze and write-up the findings. Data is also translated, if needed, back into English during this phase to check reliability.
- Digitized data entry tools with completed session notes will be automatically uploaded into the server at the end of each data collection day.
- Each facilitator and notetaker will review, modify and update, and finally approve the uploaded data for the analysis review.

**DQA:**

- Team leads or analysts will review data for quality control on a continuous basis. They will highlight any areas that need further clarification and communicate these queries to the data collection team for confirmation. The analysts’ review and feedback will be shared in person (if analysts are also in the field), or over email and phone calls (if the analysts are working remotely).
- Debriefing sessions of the findings will be carried out at the end of each data collection day and constructive alignment action taken for the coming data collection rounds.
- For a selected sample of data sets, team leads will compare the written session outcomes of the sessions with the audio recordings to measure the accuracy, quality, and completeness of data.
- Triangulate the captured data with the data registered or concluded from the other data source.
- Regular data audits throughout the data collection duration. Data will undergo one or two rounds of quality review before being considered finalized.
- Each data collector and notetaker reviews, modifies, and approves each of their submissions before the analyst reviews.

**Implementation timeline:**

The table below presents a high-level summary timeline for each component of the qualitative study.

Yearly Activities by Quarter	2023			
	Oct-Dec (Q1)	Jan-March (Q2)	April-June (Q3)	July-Sept (Q4)
<b>Qualitative Data Collection</b>				
Plan & coordinate data collection				
Train qualitative research team on qualitative & ethnographic methods (5-days)				
Round 1 interviews (Nov)				
Round 2 interviews (Jan)				
Prepare qualitative data for analysis				
Data analysis				
Integrate quantitative & qualitative analyses, write preliminary results				
Present preliminary results				
Final report				



## APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 8 – Role Play Interviews and Practice Using Data Collection Tools

Particularly in cases where team members have minimal experience using qualitative data collection tools, utilizing “role play” can provide practice prior to the field test. Try it:

1. Within your team, as per assigned roles and using the questions derived from the topical outlines, conduct a role play of a KII with one person playing the role of interviewer and the other the role of interviewee.
2. Split the qualitative team into groups that then role play a FGD with two members of the team serving as the interviewer and the notetaker and five to six team members playing the FGD members and/or observing and providing feedback on the process.
3. Then team leaders facilitate a discussion about what went well in each of the above exercises, what problems emerged, and suggestions to improve the collective process.
4. If time allows, set up various FGDs rotating the roles of interviewer and notetaker.

## Step 4: Data Analysis Plan

In this section of the QuIPS, you will describe how your data will be analyzed, how and in what form the analysis will be communicated, and the ways in which your findings will be used.

Figure 6. Section 4 of the QuIPS

SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS, DELIVERABLES and APPLICATION	
<b>Data Analysis Plan:</b>	
<b>Disaggregated by</b> (for example, gender, age, disability, degree of poverty, family composition):	
DELIVERABLES	UTILIZATION / APPLICATION

**Data analysis** is the process of bringing order to data, organizing it into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units.<sup>22</sup> **Data interpretation** means attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and linkages among descriptive units. In other words, the first step is analysis—organizing, describing, and categorizing data—and the second step is interpretation—drawing conclusions from that analysis, which offer key insights into the dynamics of interest. Throughout the process of data analysis, keep in mind the essential purpose of qualitative inquiry: to provide insights into *how* and *why*.

Qualitative information may be transferred manually into spreadsheet matrices or uploaded into qualitative analysis software, then analyzed to identify patterns in responses. These approaches are briefly described below. When analyzing qualitative data, the team member may be able to describe some quantitative aspects of the data (percentages, rates, frequency counts), while not losing sight of the diverse and detailed opinions, perceptions, and/or beliefs represented in the data. While qualitative data should complement quantitative data, qualitative data should not be turned into quantitative data.

<sup>22</sup> TOPS. (2015). *Lesson 2.4 Qualitative Data Analysis* [PowerPoint slides]. Prepared by TANGO International for TOPS and FSN with the support of USAID.

**By definition, qualitative data is captured in words or narrative form that is not expressed meaningfully in numeric form.**<sup>23</sup> It is important not to oversimplify qualitative data that is rich in detail and nuance.

Different qualitative data collection methods will require different analytical approaches. The following examples describe basic steps for starting the analysis for FGD or KII data, which are common qualitative methods:

- Determine thematic categories based on indicators or key questions from the topical guide.
- Assign qualitative data such as quotes, descriptions, or summaries to the appropriate category.
- Look for trends, patterns, or common values that emerge from the data by carefully reviewing the way people or groups describe a particular condition (e.g., a shock or stress), respond, or behave. It may be relevant to disaggregate such data by gender, age, or other categories. Often these patterns are communicated as “most,” “few,” or “the majority,” or in relation to a particular group or area of interest, and not in numerical or statistical terms.
- Look for outliers or exceptions to the patterns and trends that may provide insights into positive deviants or new results pathways in future programming.
- Identify direct quotes or descriptions to support and best articulate these patterns or exceptions.
- Triangulate information across data sources (i.e., FGDs, KIIs, social maps, quantitative data such as household surveys) to cross-check the reliability of information and to identify differences in perception among social groups based on gender, socio-economic status, or ethnicity.

**Triangulation** refers to the important process of cross-checking the **reliability** of information and the robustness of our findings. Triangulation can be used with a range of tools and techniques for data collection and analysis and with different sources of information about the same problem. In this way, the reliability and bias of findings can be assessed, and if necessary, addressed.

Findings should be triangulated across multiple data sources to check the reliability of information. In other words, cross-check your findings from FGDs and KIIs with other sources of information such as quantitative data from household surveys, findings from other humanitarian agency reports with similar activities, peer reviewed studies and relevant academic publications, direct observation, and visuals such as photos, etc. The more sources of data you have that support similar conclusions, the more reliable your findings will be.

### Using a Matrix (Manual Approach) for Data Analysis

The manual matrix approach is a low-tech, proven method of organizing both qualitative data entry and analysis. It requires team competency using a spreadsheet (such as Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets) or a simple table structure. Spreadsheets are highly suited for organizing, coding, and classifying qualitative data. This approach ensures that all team members record and synthesize information consistently and in a manner that directly responds to key research questions. Capturing qualitative data in matrices enables identification of important patterns in responses and specific contextual information that may help to

<sup>23</sup> Maxwell, D., Constan, M., Frankenberger, T., Klaus, D., & Mock, M. (2015). [Qualitative Data and Subjective Indicators for Resilience Measurement](#). Resilience Measurement Technical Working Group. Technical Series No. 4. Rome: Food Security Information Network.

**Three Steps to Data Analysis:**

**Step 1:** Read through aggregated data and develop and apply codes.

**Step 2:** Identify themes, patterns, and relationships.

**Step 3:** Summarize the data.

explain quantitative or secondary data. Developing qualitative data matrices also allows triangulation of responses from FGDs, KIIs, household surveys, and others to determine whether information is reliable.

Before qualitative data entry can begin, your spreadsheet must be formatted in a way that allows for ease of data manipulation. Matrices will need to be customized for each individual project (see [Annex 8](#) for some sample data analysis matrices). Setting up the matrix template properly in the beginning will facilitate efficient, coherent, and comprehensive data analysis.

When developing a matrix, either columns or rows can be used to enter data for separate interviews and then the other (e.g., rows or columns) can be used for specific topics of discussion based on the themes developed in the topical outline. You will also want to add a final column to the spreadsheet that allows for analysis across interviews and researcher comments and notes. In some cases, [drop-down lists](#) can be used to code for standardized responses that are pre-defined (e.g., gender of participants, age categories, geographic location names, beneficiary group types, occupation categories, as well as for the **broad topics** of discussion taken from the topical outline). [Annex 8](#) (Table 8) provides an example of a data analysis matrix that uses drop-down lists to code your data set. Utilizing drop-down lists also allows you to use the *Sort* function in Excel to sort the qualitative data by those parameters. Data can then be sorted to allow for easier comparison of qualitative data across different groups (e.g., men, women, children) and geographic locations, or use the filter to view only those responses to a specific topic of discussion.

Once your spreadsheet is formatted and customized to your study, you will be ready to begin the analysis. First, the qualitative data should be aggregated from the individual data entry matrices used during data collection into the data analysis matrix. During the analysis, completed matrices are useful tools to ensure that qualitative information can be concisely and coherently presented either on its own or integrated with quantitative survey results.

Some benefits of using a qualitative data matrix for analysis are that it:<sup>24</sup>

- allows timely comparison of qualitative data among men, women, children, and among different geographic locations or other disaggregation/categories;
- enables consistent analysis of qualitative data from multiple groups;
- does not require purchasing software or special training in software applications; and
- enables easy accessibility since spreadsheet programs are generally part of the suite of office software that most people already use, minimizing the learning curve.

<sup>24</sup> TOPS. (2015). *Lesson 2.4 Qualitative Data Analysis* [PowerPoint slides]. Prepared by TANGO International for TOPS and FSN with the support of USAID.

After entering all data into an analysis matrix, you can code the data for easier thematic analysis. **Coding** categorizes data and developing and applying thematic codes is an iterative process. First, read through your data to get a sense of what it looks like. Analyze the text to identify patterns. Then develop codes by looking for keywords or short phrases that best articulate the themes represented in your data. These can be categories or thematic areas identified in the topical outline and data collection tools. However, you will also want to add additional codes as new themes emerge. Finally, synthesize the findings and use direct quotations from participants to illustrate major themes and patterns within findings, as well as contradictions and/or notable exceptions. More information on coding and helpful tips are available in [Annex 8](#).

### Using Software (Computer-assisted Approach) for Analysis

Various qualitative software packages (e.g., NVivo, Atlas.ti, Dedoose, QSR, etc.) are available and may benefit team members by helping to store, organize, synthesize, and analyze qualitative data and/or secondary data such as articles or reports. Analysts upload data (for example, interview transcripts) into the software platform, and then code the data by themes following the established analysis protocol. Team members can use data visualization tools associated with software packages to present descriptive results.<sup>25</sup> Challenges of using qualitative software for analysis include the learning curve for proficiency and the time and effort required to transcribe and code data before the analysis begins.

Both methods for analysis—manual and computer-assisted—present different benefits and challenges. Using a matrix is generally a good choice for timely analysis in both emergency and development settings. Using software may be useful for large and longitudinal data sets, when full transcriptions are available, and when there is sufficient time and resources for in-depth analysis.

**For both methods, it is imperative that the analysts have a deep knowledge and understanding of the data set. In other words, the researcher carries out the analysis, not the software.**

**Interpretation:** The next step in analysis is to explain patterns or relationships observed from the analysis and triangulation and to draw conclusions based on the questions. Interpretation can also include convergent and divergent views on specific inquiry topics or among data sources.

### DISAGGREGATING DATA

In your QuIPS, you will need to specify how you will disaggregate the data for analysis. For example, will the analysis be disaggregated by geographic area, livelihood zone, intensity levels of activity intervention? By gender? By wealth group? By age? It will be important to consider how you will explicitly integrate these various levels of disaggregation throughout the research—into the sampling strategy, selection criteria, analysis, and presentation of findings—always guided by the research questions and objectives.

### Data Analysis Approaches:<sup>25</sup>

**Etic Approach:** Emphasizes a researcher's framework with a *deductive* approach using pre-structured codes taken from a topical guide.

**Emic Approach:** Emphasizes the respondents' perspective with a more *inductive* approach (e.g., grounded theory). This analysis is driven by the data, meaning the data is coded or categorized without fitting into a pre-determined coding framework as codes evolve during the data analysis process.

In practice, the analysis process is typically an interplay between etic and emic approaches, beginning with a close reading of the data and the development of emergent codes and themes.

<sup>25</sup> See a discussion on choosing appropriate computer assisted qualitative data analysis software and links to various software packages at the [University of California at Berkeley Library](#), along with other resources.

Below are two examples detailing an example inquiry’s plan for data analysis, deliverables, and application. The first example (Example 5) outlines how the findings from a midterm QS will be used to inform the revision of the activity’s TOC, which will affect how the data is analyzed.

*Example 5. Section 4 of the QuIPS*

<b>SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS, DELIVERABLES, and APPLICATION</b>	
<p><b>Data Analysis Plan</b></p> <p>Interviews will be recorded in the local language and translated to English. They will be reviewed, synthesized and analyzed regularly by the teams in the field, qualitative supervisors, and team leads to identify patterns, trends, outliers and exemplars with respect to the topical outlines and research questions.</p> <p>Each facilitator-notetaker team of two will work together to compile their notes (in English), one for each interview conducted and labeled according to the protocol provided during training. Researchers will then enter data into Excel matrices for analysis to identify patterns in responses and contextual information to help explain quantitative findings. Interviews will be recorded with participant consent, for the purpose of cross-checking information shared during qualitative interviews and capturing direct quotes. Qualitative responses from interviews will be triangulated across the qualitative teams and their supervisors to ensure the reliability of information and identify differences in perceptions between groups based on gender, social or economic status, and ethnicity.</p> <p>In the next stage of analysis, qualitative and quantitative analysts will work together to review and triangulate findings.</p> <p><b>Disaggregated by</b> (e.g., gender, age, degree of poverty, family composition):</p> <p>Data will be disaggregated by gender, market actor (participant) type, and geographic location (rural/urban and peri-urban).</p>	
<p><b>DELIVERABLES</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Report of preliminary findings</li> <li>2. Revision of activity TOC</li> <li>3. Stakeholder workshop with accompanying slide deck to present and collectively review key findings and discuss study design options for iterative steps</li> <li>4. Final report</li> <li>5. Study brief highlighting topline findings and program implications</li> </ol>	<p><b>UTILIZATION / APPLICATION</b></p> <p>The findings will be used to revise the activity’s TOC. The evaluation team will validate the model and revise the preliminary TOC as necessary to develop it into a functional one that reflects current programming. This process will involve a review of the risks and opportunities during the lifetime of the activity, and adaptive management across TOC pathways.</p>

In this example (Example 6), the QS seeks to understand the predictable external shocks and stressors and key aspects of the enabling environment in the implementation. These findings will inform the activity’s sustainability plan and exit strategy.

*Example 6. Section 4 of the QuIPS*

<b>SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS, DELIVERABLES and APPLICATION</b>	
<p><b>Data Analysis Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers will enter data into Excel matrices for analysis to identify patterns in responses, as well as illustrative exceptions, and synthesize contextual information to help explain quantitative findings. Data analysts will clean and review all data sets. Relevant themes will be coded and analyzed as they emerge.</li> <li>• Analysts will triangulate qualitative responses from interviews across the qualitative teams and their supervisors to ensure the reliability of information and identify similarities and/or differences in perceptions among groups based on gender, age, displacement status, type of informant(s), geographic location, social or economic status, and family composition.</li> <li>• The research team will share the preliminary analysis with the program team and discuss the findings with respect to the evaluation questions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Disaggregated by</b> (e.g., gender, age, degree of poverty, family composition):</p> <p>Data will be disaggregated by gender, age, displacement status, type of informant, and geography (by state).</p>	
<p><b>DELIVERABLES</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Final report</li> <li>2. Presentation</li> <li>3. Factsheet brief with key recommendations for the future of the project</li> </ol>	<p><b>UTILIZATION / APPLICATION</b></p> <p>The final report will include considerations for future programming. Findings will be shared internally with program staff and upper management, and externally with the donor.</p> <p>The report will include an exit strategy, including a plan for next steps (e.g., working with authorities and unions), to be discussed internally and then shared with external stakeholders.</p> <p>The report will also include more general recommendations, which will be shared externally with the donor, local unions, and other relevant stakeholders.</p>

## APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 9 – Identify Emergent Themes

1. Choose several KIIs that were conducted with individuals who share expertise on a particular topic. Working with those interview data, identify trends and patterns that emerge by carefully reviewing the way these individuals describe a particular condition (e.g., a shock or stress), and how they have responded or adjusted behaviors in response.
2. Conduct a similar exercise with data from several FGDs conducted on the same topical area, e.g., members of VSLAs, livestock groups, garden groups, etc. Considering the information gathered from these discussions, again work to identify trends and patterns that emerge from the data by carefully reviewing the way these group members describe a particular condition (e.g., a shock or stress), and how they responded or adjusted behaviors in response. It may be relevant to disaggregate such data by gender, age, or other variables.
3. Look for outliers or exceptions to the patterns and trends that may provide insights into positive deviants or new results pathways in future programming. Identify direct quotes or descriptions that support these patterns or exceptions.
4. After going through these steps, meet with the team members and leaders to troubleshoot any problems arising from this exercise. For example, did different team members interpret the same data in different ways? Do team members disagree on what was communicated by informants in the KIIs? Can you identify any areas of bias in the data interpretation? How should these situations be handled when conducting the data analysis?

## USING QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: DELIVERABLES AND APPLICATION

Having completed the data analysis and interpretation, you are ready to document and share your findings so that they can be used by your stakeholders. Your qualitative inquiry design will need to include a plan for sharing the findings and deliverables, including with participants, communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Deliverables, or products, may take a written or visual form. Generally qualitative findings may be used to improve activities, for advocacy, and for reporting. How to use the findings and in what format greatly depends on the purpose of the inquiry. Some examples of deliverables and applications of findings include the following:

- **Using findings to improve activities** involves developing a feedback loop in which the M&E team provides timely and relevant programming or sector-specific findings directly to activity teams and/or senior leadership. The deliverable will likely be an internal document and may be in the form of a quarterly brief, presentation, workshop, or dashboard.
  - **Creating a data dashboard** is one way to present near real-time data to key stakeholders. Qualitative data software often provides both data storage and data usage options. Other dashboard software options include [Power BI](#) and [Tableau](#).
- **Sharing findings with the community** is another way to be accountable to communities and to validate the findings. This also empowers communities to be involved in discussions on how to improve implementation.
- **Using findings for advocacy** means synthesizing the information that could be used by government officials or advocacy organizations to influence policies or programs. The deliverable is an external document such as a factsheet or brief that highlights the most compelling and visually attractive information and is accessible to external audiences.



- **Using findings for reporting** may include integrating qualitative and quantitative results for baseline, midterm, or endline evaluations or other inquiries throughout the award cycle in the form of reports, briefs, or presentations, as discussed earlier in this toolkit (see Table 1).

## Step 5. Anticipate Limitations, Risks, and Ethical Review

All work is done with certain constraints. Your qualitative inquiry should account for and clearly document these constraints, particularly those that relate to the individuals and communities with whom you work, data quality, and your findings.

Figure 7. Section 5 of the QuIPS

<b>SECTION 5: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b>
<b>LIMITATIONS AND RISKS</b>
<b>ETHICAL REVIEW STATUS / INFORMED CONSENT</b>

### LIMITATIONS AND RISKS

Above all, a qualitative inquiry should “do no harm” for study participants and others involved in each step of the process. For all studies, it is important to anticipate the limitations and risks that may affect your interactions with study participants (and ultimately inquiry outcomes), as well as how you will minimize them. Limitations and risks may include internal and external factors, such as timing, staff capacity, weather, or an uncertain security context.

As previously discussed, the design of your inquiry should seek to offset bias throughout the process. For qualitative inquiry, social desirability or other types of response bias are common potential constraints with respondents, including the tendency of respondents to answer questions in a way they think the interviewer (or partner), or their social group wants them to respond. To limit this bias, the team should preface the interview by clearly stating that the team member is independent of USAID/the partner (if applicable) and/or explain the interviewer’s ability to make decisions (or not) for the activity. The interviewer should also use techniques to promote comfortable interaction and honest exchange of views during the interview. If the team believes overall quality of the data were impacted by such bias, it should be noted in the report limitations.

### ETHICAL REVIEW STATUS AND INFORMED CONSENT

Along with many other federal agencies, USAID has adopted the Common Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects (sometimes referred to as the “Common Rule”) as USAID regulation (referred to in this document as the Policy—see [22 CFR 225](#)). The Policy sets standards for the protection of human research subjects when study activities supported by USAID involve human subjects. Organizations awarded USAID support are responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research. (See the Automated Directives System (ADS) reference: [Protection of Human Subjects in Research Supported by USAID](#)).

The following are basic principles to factor into the design of your qualitative study or monitoring:

- **Institutional Review Board (IRB):** Review of the inquiry by a properly constituted ethical committee or IRB may be required. Survey and similar research under formal human subjects protection is exempt from IRB review unless the confidentiality of collected data may be compromised through identification and the nature of the information disclosed is very sensitive, or the inquiry includes minor children under 18 years of age. Even if an expedited or full IRB review



is not warranted or required, consider having appropriate in-country colleagues and/or community members review tools and interview questions to gain an ethical perspective from the point of view of participants. In all cases, be sure to consult with your research or implementing organization for appropriate IRB protocol in the countries where you will carry out the inquiry, as this will vary.

- **Informed consent:** Obtaining informed consent in a meaningful way safeguards both participants and researchers and is designed to promote communication and understanding.
- **A meaningful assessment of risk and benefits:** Minimal Risk, as defined in the Policy means "the probability and magnitude of the harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests."

These topics should be factored into the overall design and timing for the inquiry and addressed specifically during training, and the team members should be keenly aware of ethical issues, requirements, and appropriate protocols. Training should also include time for researchers to prepare for and practice communicating issues around consent and confidentiality.

The example below details limitations, risks, ethical review status/informed consent for an example inquiry.

*Example 7. Section 5 of the QuIPS*

SECTION 5: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
LIMITATIONS AND RISKS	
Limitations/risks	Mitigation measures
Security breach/restricted access	The research team will work to ensure constant monitoring of the security status in the area while conducting data collection, including working closely with key informants and security personnel with knowledge of the situation on the ground to gather contextual information on the dynamic situation. The research and logistic plan will be adjusted to ensure the safety and security of all study participants, field researchers, and staff involved in the study. The study team will give full attention to ensure the safety of women and all participants in locations affected by conflict and insecurity in the region. With this in mind, the study team may make substitutions of study participants, aligned with selection criteria, and communicate any changes that are made to ensure the safety of all study participants and research staff.
High rate of non-response	Keep the sample agile and adapt across the data collection timeline. In the case of substitutions that result from attrition or security risks, the study team will endeavor to recruit participants that meet similar criteria as the original study participant.
Capacity of data collectors	Ensure the delivery of proper training, competence, and compliance with security protocols for all qualitative researchers before the activities are initiated. The maintenance of capacity and proper data collection will be done through daily debriefs and active troubleshooting done by team leads and HQ.
Bias in sampling	Given the risk of selection bias, areas that are easier to access would be more likely to be chosen for FGDs and KIIs and might have a different result from the harder to reach areas, we have stratified the sample and will continually review recruitment by categories over the course of the study to ensure the sample includes participants in areas that are more difficult to access.

SECTION 5: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
Network coverage, especially in rural areas	The research team will provide staff with alternative network bundles or dongles to maintain connectivity and data coverage.
<p><b>ETHICAL REVIEW STATUS / INFORMED CONSENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A statement of consent and confidentiality will be presented to all KIIs and FGDs to ensure voluntary participation and inform participants of how the information and data collected will be shared and what form the deliverables will take. Verbal consent will be documented for all interviews.</li> <li>• The identity of all participants will be coded, delinked from data narratives, and anonymized.</li> <li>• The research team will collect written informed consent for all photos.</li> <li>• All quotations used in reports will be anonymized.</li> <li>• This is a final activity evaluation and not public research; thus formal ethical review is not required. However, the research team will seek documentation of approval by the appropriate government ministries or ethics boards to conduct the qualitative evaluation.</li> </ul>	

**APPLICATION: ACTIVITY 10 – Review your QuIPS**

1. Review your draft QuIPS in detail and make note of limitations and risks associated with the choices made throughout each section. Bear in mind that all studies and inquiries include limitations and risks. The expectation is not that you eliminate all of them. Rather, use this section to develop awareness among your team and stakeholders and consider mitigations.
2. Then, review your training requirements to ensure you allocate adequate time and attention to discuss the basic principles of ethical research described above and how they apply to the specifics of your study/monitoring.
3. Finally, document in the QuIPS your plans for or outcomes of an ethical review. If your inquiry is exempt from an ethical review, provide that justification.

## Annex 1. Checklist of Documents for Desk Review

**Checklist of project documents and other relevant documents for desk review** to be used in your pre-work to identify evidence gaps. This suggested list of documents may vary by activity and should be used as a guide. **Not all documents will apply.**

ITEM	NEEDED?
• Logical Framework (LogFrame)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Theory of Change (TOC)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Indicator Performance Tracking Tables (IPTT) and monitoring data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Output and outcome monitoring reports/data	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Approved activity proposal narrative	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Inception report	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Annual reports, quarterly reports, and PREPs	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Baseline study report	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Cash and voucher feasibility studies	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Food security assessments (FAO/WFP/FEWS NET)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Food distribution and post-distribution monitoring reports	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Market assessments and bulletins	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Rapid needs assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Situation reports	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) reports	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Lists of beneficiaries	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• List of partners (government, NGOs, UN agencies)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Lists of intervention sites <i>identifying the type(s) of interventions at each location, with start dates of implementation, numbers of direct participants and indirect beneficiaries, quantities of commodities distributed, etc.; or an updated operational map</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Item distribution reports <i>that include location of distribution, type of distribution, and planned and actual quantities, ration sizes, and timing of distributions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Past performance evaluations (e.g., baseline study, midterm evaluation report and post-midterm utilization and action plan, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• National level reports <i>such as demographic and health survey, living standards measurement study, agricultural censuses, or data that may be relevant; national policy and strategy documents</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Inter-agency coordination related documents (e.g., relevant cluster monitoring plans or reports)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Peer reviewed studies and relevant academic publications	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
• Gray literature or reports from other similar activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

## Annex 2. QuIPS Template

This toolkit helps you design your qualitative inquiry and document that design in the QuIPS. Application sections throughout the toolkit provide questions and directions to help you with the design and documentation. Note, in the MS Word version of the QuIPS, you can expand each row or section as needed, to accommodate your text (see workbook).

Table 2. QuIPS

<b>QM/QS # [Insert title of qualitative monitoring or study inquiry]</b>
<b>PRE-WORK</b>
<p><b>SOURCE DOCUMENTS and EVIDENCE GAPS</b></p> <p><b>Source Documents</b> (List any documents consulted in the desk review to identify evidence gaps):</p> <p><b>Evidence gap(s)</b> (List any evidence gaps identified):</p>
<p><b>TEAM and STAKEHOLDERS</b></p> <p><b>Collaborators:</b></p> <p><b>Reviewers:</b></p> <p><b>Stakeholders:</b></p>
<b>SECTION 1: PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, and RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>
<p><b>Purpose:</b></p> <p><b>Objective(s):</b></p>
<p><b>Research / inquiry question(s):</b></p>
<p><b>Data type</b> (Process / Output / Outcome / Impact / Context / Crosscutting theme):</p>
<b>SECTION 2: DESIGN and METHODOLOGY</b>
<p><b>Data sources(s) and inquiry methods:</b></p> <p><b>Sampling strategy and selection criteria:</b></p>

<b>QM/QS # [Insert title of qualitative monitoring or study inquiry]</b>	
<b>Data collection tools:</b>	
<b>SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN</b>	
<b>Study team composition:</b>	
<b>Frequency and timing:</b>	
<b>Training requirements:</b>	
<b>Data recording, data management, and quality assurance:</b>	
<b>Implementation timeline:</b>	
<b>SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS, DELIVERABLES and APPLICATION</b>	
<b>Data Analysis Plan</b>	
<b>Disaggregated by</b> (for example, gender, age, disability, degree of poverty, family composition):	
<b>DELIVERABLES</b>	<b>UTILIZATION / APPLICATION</b>
<b>SECTION 5: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b>	
<b>LIMITATIONS AND RISKS</b>	
<b>ETHICAL REVIEW STATUS / INFORMED CONSENT</b>	

## Annex 3. Qualitative Resources

### Resource List for Qualitative M&E

#### Qualitative research concepts and methods:

- IDEAL [QualME: Qualitative Toolkit Online Workshop](#) (June 8, 2023).
- FHI360, [Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide](#), with the support of USAID in 2005.
- Michael Q. Patton's [Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice](#) (4th ed.), CA: Sage Publications (2015).
- Russell Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (6th ed.), Lanham, MD: The Roman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc. (2018).
- TOPS FSN Network (TANGO International and USAID/FFP), Qualitative Tools and Analysis, Module 2 of the [Monitoring and Evaluation Facilitator's Guide](#) (2015).
- Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell's *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.), Wiley: Jossey-Bass (2015).
- Monique Hennink, J. Hutter, and Ajay Bailey's *Qualitative Research Methods*, CA: Sage Publications (2020).
- Matthew Miles, A.M. Huberman, and J. Saldaña's *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (4th ed.), CA: Sage Publications (2020).
- *Foundations in Resilience Toolkit: Qualitative Methods for Resilience Programs*, by the UNDP Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund Resilience Knowledge Hub, by K. Fox, and J. Stack (2020).
- [Make Me a Change Agent: An SBC Resource for WASH, Agriculture, and Livelihoods Activities, a resource guide](#), edited by A. Love and N. Weber and based on the *Make Me a Change Agent* resource published by The TOPS Program in 2015. Washington, D.C.: SCALE Award and PRO-WASH Award (2020).
- World Bank's [Understanding People's Perspectives on Identification: A Qualitative Research Toolkit](#), Washington, D.C. (2020).

#### Qualitative data, design, and sampling:

- The Food Security Information Network (FSIN) [Qualitative Data and Subjective Indicators for Resilience Measurement](#) provides guidance and examples for qualitative approaches to resilience measurement.
- This [blog by Daniel Turner](#) discusses the idea of estimating a qualitative sample size based on reaching a "saturation point."

#### Data analysis:

- These [notes](#) provide a helpful summary of how to get started with coding qualitative data, drawn from the complete Johnny Saldaña's *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (4th ed.), CA: Sage Publications (2021).
- This [guidance note](#) by [The Innovation Network](#) offers a summary and key questions for participatory analysis.

- [Tools for Evaluating Climate Change Adaptation Program Interventions](#), including participatory research and analysis integrated with quantitative and cost-benefit approaches, as well as subjective multi-criteria analysis. This toolkit was prepared by TANGO International for the USAID-funded Adaptation Thought Leadership and Assessments initiative (2019).
- Charles Vanover, Johnny Saldaña, and Paul Mihas' [Analyzing and Interpreting Qualitative Research: After the Interview](#), United States: SAGE Publications (2021).
- IDEAL QualME peer community session on [Qualitative Data Analysis Tools](#), (November 2021).

#### **Data software and data visualization:**

- IDEAL QualME peer community session on [Mixed Method Data Analysis, Presentation and Application](#) (September 2022).
- Johns Hopkins Libraries presents an [overview and links](#) for qualitative data analysis software.
- Predictive Analytic Today presents an [overview](#) of open-source qualitative data analysis software.
- [NVivo](#) is a qualitative data capture, management, and analysis software. Many webinars are available on using NVivo for remote qualitative fieldwork.
- [Evergreen](#) data offers a collection of options, or chart chooser, for qualitative data visualization.
- [Ona](#) is a Kenya-based software company (formerly Formhub) with a web-based and mobile app that allows the monitoring of real-time field data collection and analysis.

#### **Case studies:**

- The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Chronic Poverty Research Centre [slide deck](#) presents reflections on using **life history approaches**.
- Richard Smith's *A Guide to Participatory Program Monitoring with Most Significant Change, Outcome Harvesting, and Outcome Mapping* from CARE

#### **Qualitative Researcher Training:**

- Causal Designs [Qualitative Enumerator Training Manual](#) and Training-of-Trainers model for remote qualitative researcher trainings.
- IDEAL [QualME: Implementing Qualitative Data Collection](#) session (June 9, 2022).

#### **Qualitative methods during COVID-19:**

- An IDEAL sheet on [Frequently Asked Questions](#) related to qualitative M&E for food security activities during COVID-19.
- A [Hygiene Hub Summary report](#) on remote quantitative and qualitative approaches for understanding COVID-19 related behaviors and perceptions.

## Annex 4. A Selection of Qualitative Methods and Tools

Most qualitative methods and tools come from Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs), which aim to gain insight into a community's perspective of its main needs, translate these findings into action, and establish an ongoing relationship between service providers and local communities. PRAs offer a growing set of approaches and methods that enable local people to share, analyze, and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions. PRA methods use, for example, mapping and modeling techniques, transect walks, matrix scoring, seasonal calendars, trend and change analysis, wellbeing and wealth ranking and grouping, and analytical diagramming—all of which are grounded in robust and respectful interviews and facilitated group discussions.<sup>26</sup>

This annex presents only a handful of commonly used interview techniques and interactive methods.<sup>27</sup> **As discussed in the toolkit, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and factors such as time, resources, accessibility, and logistical constraints drive the selection of the most appropriate method(s) in any qualitative inquiry. Most qualitative studies will use a combination of two or more of these interview methods.** The methods and tools you will find in this annex include:

- [Core Staff for Qualitative Research](#)
- [Interviews and Guided Discussions](#)
  - [Key Informant Interviews](#)
  - [Focus Group Discussions](#)
  - [Multi-criteria Analysis](#)
  - [Case Study Analysis: Positive Deviance, Most Significant Change, Community Ethnography](#)
  - [Life History Approach](#)
- [Interactive Participatory Tools](#)
  - [Venn Diagram](#)
  - [Seasonal Calendar](#)
  - [Community/Social Mapping](#)
  - [Wealth Ranking](#)
  - [PhotoVoice](#)

### Core Staff for Qualitative Research

Each study has unique staffing needs and team composition will depend on the size of the study. For example, a team may have multiple people in the same role for larger studies (e.g., several field coordinators or multiple field researchers) or a team may have one person performing multiple roles for smaller studies (e.g., the field coordinator is also the trainer, or the data quality manager also serves as the data analyst). However, in order to ensure quality control and data management, most qualitative studies should generally include each of the following core team members:

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<sup>26</sup> Chambers, R. (1994). The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal. Institute of Development Studies, Brighton. *World Development* 22(7), 953–969.

<sup>27</sup> [This site](#) provides detailed information on a number of methods.



Table 3. Core staff for qualitative research

Role	Key Responsibilities
<b>Team Lead/Lead Researcher</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is responsible for overall managerial support to the research team. Typically, a senior staff member of the research organization or a consultant who is a leading expert with a strong qualitative research background.</li> <li>• Establishes regular check-in meetings with the field team to monitor any problems or unexpected information that may occur throughout all phases of fieldwork.</li> <li>• Works with the field coordinator to manage data as needed, and troubleshoots when issues arise during the data collection, data recording, and translation processes.</li> <li>• Reviews incoming data, provides feedback, and returns to the field coordinator to work with the team to revise, as needed.</li> <li>• Oversees the process of writing the final report or other key deliverables.</li> </ul>
<b>Trainer(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures research team is intimately familiar with the purpose, objectives, and research questions.</li> <li>• Is responsible for training the team in the substance and ethics of qualitative data collection.</li> <li>• Ensures that the entire research team has a full understanding of the data collection tool and works closely with the research team to refine the tools during training and field testing.</li> <li>• Reports to the lead researcher.</li> </ul>
<b>Field Coordinator</b>  <i>(May have multiple people in this role depending on the study size)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a key member of the core research team.</li> <li>• Coordinates all qualitative data collection activities. Makes the necessary preparations for fieldwork and organizes and directs the fieldwork.</li> <li>• Arranges for transportation, lodging, and food/per diem, and research materials for the team.</li> <li>• Leads the post-data collection debrief meetings and writes up debrief notes.</li> <li>• Conducts DQA checks of field notes and translations of recordings to monitor data quality. Reviews incoming data to verify data is accurate and provides feedback to field researchers.</li> <li>• Conducts regular spot checks to observe interviews being conducted, provides feedback to field teams, and may conduct re-interviews to compare results to those already completed by the field researchers.</li> <li>• Highlights any areas in the qualitative data that need further clarification and communicates these queries to the data collection team for further detail.</li> <li>• Compiles data, uploads data to the server, and sends electronic version to the team lead.</li> <li>• Serves as contact person for reporting ethical protocol violations.</li> <li>• Reports to the lead researcher.</li> </ul>
<b>Data Quality Manager</b>  <i>(Note, this role is often taken on or</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is responsible for correct and complete storage of collected data to ensure confidentiality.</li> <li>• Is responsible, along with the field coordinator, for all other aspects of data management.</li> </ul>

Role	Key Responsibilities
<p><i>shared with field coordinators and research leads</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides field researchers with final versions of data collection tools. This may be in hard copy (paper) form, electronic, or uploaded to tablets, as appropriate.</li> <li>• Is responsible for monitoring any incoming or outgoing data and running data quality checks.</li> <li>• Prior to data analysis, responsible for deidentifying, anonymizing, and encrypting data to ensure respondent confidentiality and secure storage.</li> <li>• Reports to the lead researcher.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Field Researcher(s):</b></p> <p><b>Facilitator(s)/ Interviewer(s)</b></p> <p><i>(May have multiple people in this role depending on the study size)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks the local language in which interviews will be conducted. Facilitates and moderates the discussion sessions and interviews (e.g., FGDs, KIIs, case studies, etc.).</li> <li>• Provides input in developing the topical outline and data collection tools. Field researchers are likely to have a much better understanding of context, relevance, and appropriateness of questions, and can bring this knowledge to refine tools to make them as effective as possible.</li> <li>• May be involved in translating tools from English, for example, to the preferred local language for data collection.</li> <li>• Participates in post-data collection debrief meetings.</li> <li>• Translates notes or transcripts from interviews conducted in local language to preferred language for analysis (i.e., English, Spanish, etc.).</li> <li>• Is responsible for inputting interview data into data entry forms/matrices.</li> <li>• Sends data to the field coordinator for initial review.</li> <li>• Reports to the field coordinator.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Field Researcher(s):</b></p> <p><b>Notetaker(s)</b></p> <p><i>(May have multiple people in this role depending on the study size)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks the local language in which interviews will be conducted and takes detailed notes during data collection activities.</li> <li>• Assists the facilitator during discussion sessions and interviews.</li> <li>• Manages audio and/or video recording equipment during discussion sessions and interviews.</li> <li>• Provides input in developing the topical outline and data collection tools. Field researchers are likely to have a much better understanding of context, relevance, and appropriateness of questions, and can bring this knowledge to refine tools to make them as effective as possible.</li> <li>• Participates in post-data collection debrief meetings.</li> <li>• Expands field notes after each discussion session or interview.</li> <li>• Reports to the field coordinator.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Data Analyst</b></p> <p><i>(May have multiple people in this role depending on the study size)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is responsible for organizing, cleaning, coding, analyzing, and writing up the findings from the qualitative data once data is collected, transcribed, and translated into English or preferred language for analysis.</li> <li>• May also assist with deidentifying, anonymizing, and encrypting data to ensure confidentiality of respondents and secure storage.</li> <li>• Writes up findings in a final report or other key deliverables.</li> <li>• Reports to the lead researcher.</li> </ul>

## Interviews and Guided Discussions

### KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KIIS)

**Purpose:** To gain information from an individual or small group in a semi-structured interview on a specific topic of interest.

**Time required:** Average is usually 1–1.5 hours per KII but can vary. KIIs should be no longer than 1 hour to avoid interviewee fatigue.

**Description:** KIIs are guided conversations in which an interviewer asks questions to gain in-depth information about a specific topic from an expert or people knowledgeable about the subject. The intent is not to constrain the conversation, but to facilitate a discussion that pairs the knowledge or expertise of an informant with the main questions of the inquiry. New questions are allowed to arise over the course of the interview, to probe information shared by the informant. This construct is different from questionnaires and surveys which pose precisely structured questions from which the interviewer does not deviate. Rather, a KII is a relatively informal, relaxed discussion around a predetermined topic.

Depending on the nature and scope of the topics, the qualitative team identifies appropriate groups from which the key informants may be drawn and then selects a few from each group, possibly across different intervention areas. The selection of key informants depends on the study design, including sampling and selection criteria. Typically, key informants are intimately familiar with the issues and challenges related to the interventions that are being monitored or evaluated. Examples of informants that might be interviewed as part of a USAID/BHA activity include lead farmers, vendors, extension agents, health volunteers, women leaders, schoolteachers, religious leaders, village elders, and VSLA members. Key informants may also be individuals who might not be comfortable expressing their opinion in a group.

To carry out a KII, the interviewer prepares an interview guide, or topical outline, that lists a predetermined set of open-ended questions or issues to explore during an interview, all flowing from the research questions. The guide serves as a mental checklist and ensures that interviewers focus on the same types of information across interviews. An interviewer may change the order of the questions to facilitate an open discussion and will adapt the specific questions to the informant's area of expertise. Using the guide to provide a core set of questions, the interviewer is free to pursue certain questions in greater depth.

It is best to conduct interviews in pairs, with one person facilitating the conversation and one taking detailed notes. The KII begins with the interviewer presenting the context of the inquiry and its objectives to the interviewee. Based on the topical outline, the interview team prepares a set of open-ended questions, allowing the informants to express opinions through discussion. Questions are generally simple, with a logical sequence to help the discussion flow. It is important to practice, test, and refine interview questions prior to the KII.

KIIs may be conducted simultaneously or sequenced with other methods (e.g., FGDs, interactive tools) to triangulate findings across methods, depending on the needs of the evaluation or monitoring protocol.

#### **Process:**

- Using open-ended (not answerable by yes/no) questions, develop a topical outline and semi-structured interview guide and establish protocols—the rules that guide the conduct of the interview.
- Based on the study design and selection criteria, identify key informants to interview.
- Set the tone for the discussion by introducing yourself and the co-facilitator or notetaker and describe the purpose of the interview and how much time you expect to take (usually 30 to 60

minutes, depending on the tool and the availability of the informant), and the stipulations of informed consent, as appropriate (e.g., explain how responses will be used, that participation is voluntary and confidential, and that questions do not have to be answered).

- Explain the means to record the session, always using written notes, with a recording as backup if appropriate.
- Use the topical outline and questions as a guide but allow for flexibility in the conversation to explore new information and/or issues as they arise.
- Observe proper interviewing techniques, prioritizing respect for the informant and demonstrating genuine curiosity in the information an informant shares.
- Probe for clarification and deeper insights (use relevant follow-up questions as needed).
- Close the interview by thanking the participant, explaining how their insights will be used when the larger process is completed, and any opportunities and avenues for further input.

**Limitations to consider:** Due to the semi-structured nature of a KII, which is intended to be adapted to a particular respondent, there is more variation in the data collected than for a structured interview. This may limit the comparability or representativeness of responses across KIIs. This is important to consider in the analysis phase, and to clearly situate findings in terms of trends and/or exceptions that appear in the data set.

As with all qualitative inquiry, the effectiveness of a KII depends heavily on the qualitative team's familiarity with the broader research questions, enabling them to make in-the-moment decisions on appropriate probes. Moreover, the training and experience of qualitative inquiry team members impacts the quality of the data. Another limitation to keep in mind for KIIs is that the information expressed in the interview involves the opinions and perspectives of that individual. It is crucial to triangulate KII data with other data sources.

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDS)

**Purpose:** The purpose of the FGD is to obtain information about a group's understanding, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes on a particular topic or problem and its causes. FGDs differ from individual interviews in that the discussion allows for interaction among all the members of the group. FGDs can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insights drawn from information shared during the discussion as well as keen observation of the group dynamic.

**Time required:** Average is usually 1–2 hours per FGD but can vary.

**Description:** The focus group is a group of interacting individuals who share a common interest or characteristic, brought together by a moderator who facilitates group members in reflecting on a predetermined, or focused, set of questions.

Ideally, a focus group includes six to ten people, selected because they have certain characteristics that relate to the topic of interest. In most cases, it is helpful to carry out FGDs in groups disaggregated by gender and/or age to ensure men, women, and youth have an opportunity to openly share different perspectives that may emerge within these groups.

The moderator or facilitator creates a safe and open space and encourages different perceptions and points of view, without pressuring participants to vote, plan, or reach consensus.<sup>28</sup> It is critically important to encourage all members of a FGD to participate over the course of the conversation. Careful and

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<sup>28</sup> Krueger, R. A. (1988). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Sage Publications.

systematic analysis of the discussions provides clues and insights as to how an activity, service, or opportunity is perceived by the group.

**Process:**

- Identify key questions related to the indicator and develop a topical outline.
- Define the purpose of the focus group.
- Identify the participants and invite them to join the discussion.
- Arrive before the participants and arrange the room so all participants can view one another. Tip: U-shaped or circular seating is recommended.
- As participants arrive, set the tone for a comfortable, enjoyable discussion by welcoming them just as any gracious host would.
- Introduce yourself and the co-facilitator or notetaker and describe the purpose of the interview and how much time you expect to take (usually 60 to 90 minutes). Allow sufficient time for all attendees to participate.
- Discuss the stipulations of informed consent, as appropriate (e.g., explain how responses will be used, that participation is voluntary and confidential, and that questions do not have to be answered).
- Explain the means to record the session, always using written notes, with a recording as backup if appropriate.
- Carry out the discussion using the topical outline. The facilitator and notetaker should maintain their respective roles and interact with each other throughout the discussion to foster open conversation among participants. Typically, the notetaker only interjects if absolutely necessary, e.g., to clarify a critical comment in the discussion, and strives to not interrupt the flow of the discussion; the notetaker may even sit outside of the group, recording both verbal discussion and non-verbal observations, such as group dynamics.
- Allow time for spontaneity, i.e., asking spontaneous questions that arise from the discussion, probing deeper into a topic. You can also invite the participants to ask questions of one another.
- Close the focus group. This includes thanking the participants, explaining how their insights will be used when the larger process is completed, and opportunities and avenues for further input.

**Limitations to consider:** Many potential limitations of an FGD can be mitigated with strong facilitation. For instance, it is common for other community members to see the focus group and become onlookers, but the facilitator should address this immediately, politely explaining what is happening and asking the onlookers to leave or find an alternative location for the discussion. Another common limitation for the group setting is that a few focus group participants may dominate the conversation. The facilitator must be keenly aware of group dynamics and foster an environment that enables all focus group participants to share their thoughts and experiences. This includes encouraging more reserved members to speak up and freely express their own ideas and feelings. Strong facilitation skills, preparation and practice can also enable a facilitator to meet the challenge of allowing the discussion to flow organically, while keeping the group on track to cover the desired topics. Timing matters!

### MULTI-CRITERIA ANALYSIS (MCA)

**Description:** MCA is a qualitative analytic approach that may be used during FGDs to understand how households, communities, and institutions make strategic decisions when there are multiple objectives (or “criteria”) to consider, and when the costs, benefits, or impacts of a particular strategy are difficult to

quantify. In climate change adaptation and resilience research, for example, MCA has been used together with open-ended participatory approaches to prioritize interventions. MCA is used in a focus group setting to assess interventions against an explicit set of objectives or weighted criteria, which are determined by stakeholders (e.g., community or institutional study participants). FGD members score alternative interventions based on how well they meet a given objective. Scores are then aggregated to indicate overall performance or priorities among interventions. MCA can be used at multiple levels to merge community and institutional priorities. Step-by-step guidance to implement MCA, together with other qualitative methods, can be found in [Tools for Evaluating Climate Change Adaptation Program Interventions](#).<sup>29, 30</sup>

## CASE STUDY ANALYSIS<sup>31</sup>

A case study is a narrative about something unique, special, or interesting. These studies can center on individuals, organizations, processes, programs, communities, institutions, and even events. These narratives provide important information on context and the underlying dynamics of social change. A case study of an activity, for instance, can highlight successes, challenges, or unintended outcomes. Cases might be selected because they are highly effective, not effective, representative, typical, or of special interest.

Case studies describe what happened, when, to whom, and with what consequences. Case studies are often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the program and why. While the objective of a case study is to provide key insights that may inform and improve the implementation of an activity—rather than “success stories”—for case studies that demonstrate success, USAID provides [guidelines](#) to communicate these findings. You can also find USAID guidance on evaluative case studies in this [technical note](#).

Another case study approach, **Positive Deviance**, captures the stories of individuals who experienced significant success when compared to other activity participants who share common characteristics, such as assets and access to natural resources.<sup>32, 33</sup> This approach involves in-depth interviews with activity participants identified as “positive deviants” to document the successful strategies or behaviors that enable them to experience positive change or achieve higher measures of wellbeing. Positive deviance approaches are used increasingly in resilience studies, for instance, to explore the strategies households used to recover or maintain their livelihoods and wellbeing well above that of their peer activity participants, despite facing the same shock and receiving no extra operational resources.

Similarly, the **Most Significant Change (MSC)**<sup>34</sup> method uses qualitative interviewing techniques to collect stories of significant change from individuals, households, and activity stakeholders. Researchers then systematically select stories that offer key insights into the questions of interest, such as the experience of households and community members, the challenges they face, how they respond, and ultimately, the

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<sup>29</sup> TANGO International and Chemonics. (2019). *Tools for Evaluating Climate Change Adaptation Program Interventions: A Toolkit*. Prepared for: United States Agency for International Development Adaptation Thought Leadership and Assessments (ATLAS).

<sup>30</sup> Fox, K.M., S. Nelson, Frankenberger, T. R., & Langworthy, M. (2018). Climate Change Adaptation in Ethiopia: Developing a Method to Assess Program Options. In Z. Zommers & K. Alverson Resilience (Eds.), *The Science of Adaptation to Climate Change* (pp. 253–265). Elsevier.

<sup>31</sup> Neale, P., Thapa, S. & Boyce, C. (2006). *Preparing a case study: A Guide for Designing and Conducting a Case Study for Evaluation Input*. Pathfinder International.

<sup>32</sup> Food for the Hungry. (2021). Utilizing a Positive Deviance Approach to a Resilience Context: What Four Case Studies Reveal. Produced by Food for the Hungry as part of the Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award.

<sup>33</sup> Nutrition Working Group, Child Survival Collaborations and Resources Group (CORE). (2002). [Positive Deviance/Hearth: A Resource Guide for Sustainably Rehabilitating Malnourished Children](#).

<sup>34</sup> See Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). [The ‘Most Significant Change’ \(MSC\) Technique: A Guide to Its Use](#). USAID Learning Lab.

impact of an intervention or activity.<sup>35</sup> It is important to clearly define the research questions and the sampling strategy to ensure MSC offers robust qualitative findings.

**Community Ethnography**<sup>36</sup> recognizes the complex social makeup and dynamics of a community, particularly one that is affected by compounding shocks and stresses. Study teams spend comparatively more time in sampled communities, investigating the dynamics of change in relation to the research questions through multiple qualitative approaches such as observation, KIIs, and FGDs, as well as life histories and mapping, for example, discussed below. In addition to documenting community dynamics, the inquiry team conducts interviews with informants who may provide relevant insights into the effects of interventions or an activity in the context of their community and in relation to external actors.

**Time required:** Average is usually 1–2 hours per interview and between 2–4 hours to develop each case study/story.

## LIFE HISTORY APPROACH

Another example of an individual case study is a life history interview (also called ethnography). The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) provides reflections on the benefits and challenges of using the life history approach.<sup>37</sup> The outputs of the life history interview may be: (a) a narrative of the respondent's life, and (b) a life history map/infographic. These interviews can raise painful experiences, making it important to employ a trauma-informed approach. This entails being mindful and recognizing the importance of empowering interviewees with choices and allowing them to determine how much of their story they want to reveal. This is particularly critical when collecting data from traumatized or vulnerable populations (e.g., refugees, IDPs, etc.). Because of the intimacy of the life history approach, ensure the method is appropriate, fit for the purpose, and that data can be used. The example in Figure 8 shows how this approach was used with a participant of a USAID/BHA market-based emergency food security activity in Zimbabwe.

In this case, the in-depth life history interviews provided a better understanding of the impact of food assistance in the broader context of major events in participants' lives—in particular, how food assistance contributed to the resilience trajectories of activity participants.<sup>38</sup>

In the life history approach, individual profiles are selected to illustrate diversity across a sample for a core set of variables of interest, for example, household status, access to infrastructure and services, ecological conditions, and engagement with formal and informal markets and financial institutions. Also, see [Annex 3](#) for a link to an overview of the life history practical approach.

<sup>35</sup> Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique*.

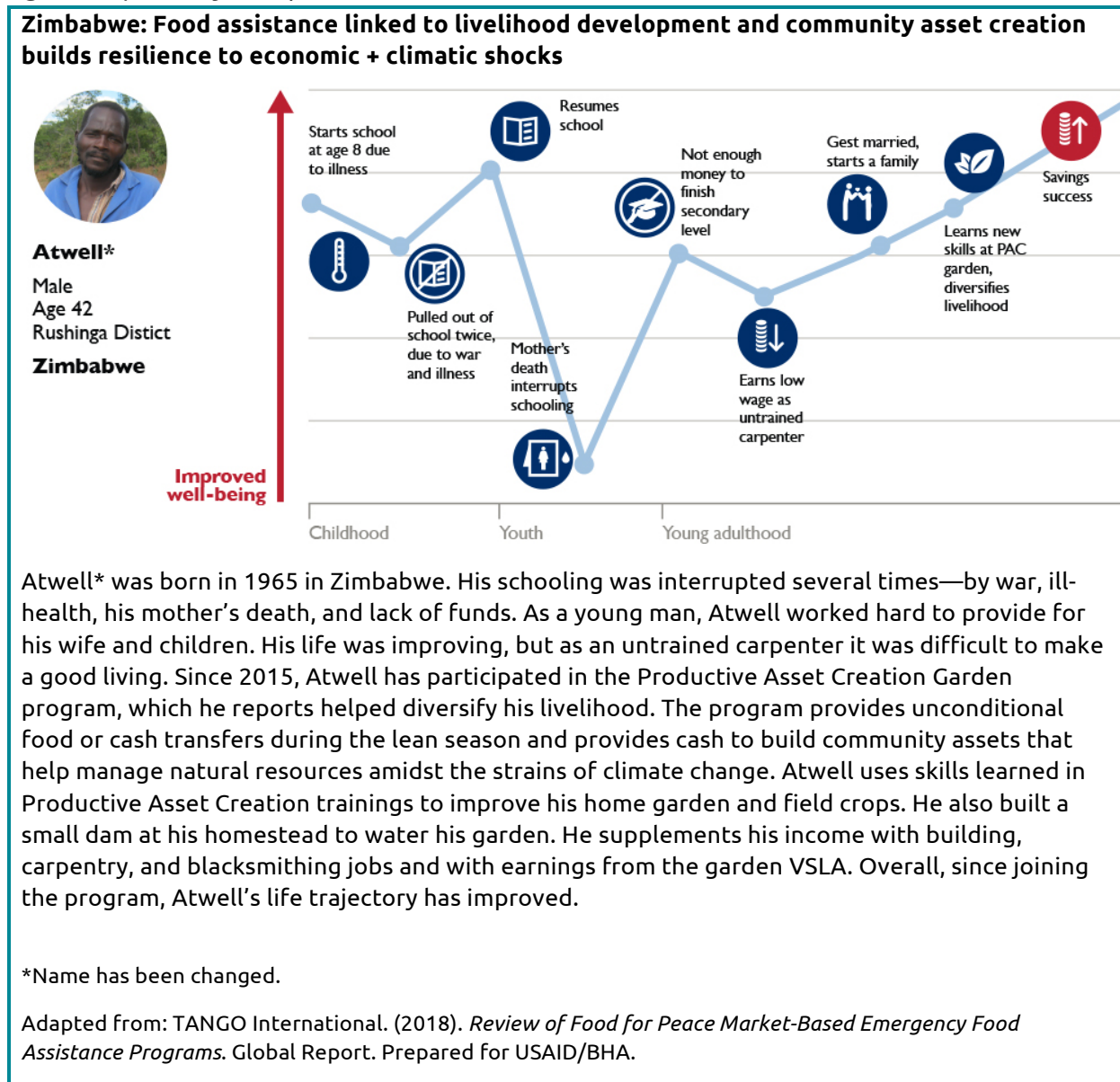
<sup>36</sup> Austin, D.E. (2003). Community-Based Collaborative Team Ethnography: A Community-University-Agency Partnership. *Human Organization* 62(2): 143–52.

<sup>37</sup> Bird, K. n.d. [Reflections on using life history approaches](#) [Presentation]. Chronic Poverty Research Center.

<sup>38</sup> Adapted from Scott, L., & Diwakar, V. (2016). *Ensuring Escapes from Poverty are Sustained in Rural Bangladesh*. USAID Report prepared by ODI for ACDI/VOCA with funding from USAID/E3's Leveraging Economic Opportunities (LEO) activity.



Figure 8. Life history example



**Time required:** Average is usually 1–2 hours per interview and between 2–4 hours to develop each life history case study.

**Process:**

- Identify a case study topic, considering types of cases and why they are unique or important. Identify stakeholders who will be involved and interviewed.
- Identify what information is needed and from whom.
- Identify all documents needed for review.
- Develop a topical outline to establish the rules that guide the administration of the interview. (See [Data Collection Tools](#) in Step 2 of this document.)
  - Where necessary, translate guides into local languages and test translation.



- Set up interviews with stakeholders (be sure to explain the purpose, why the stakeholder has been chosen, and the expected duration).
- Seek informed consent from each respondent (written or oral documentation). Re-explain the purpose of interview, why the stakeholder has been chosen, expected duration, whether and how the information will be kept confidential, and the use of a notetaker/tape recorder.
- If the respondent has consented, conduct the interview and take notes.

## Interactive Participatory Tools

Interactive data collection tools are typically less structured than interviews, depend on direct participation from community members, and are especially well-suited for analysis of agricultural, ecological, and social systems information within a particular community. Among the many participatory and interactive tools, the most common are Venn diagrams, seasonal calendars, community/social maps, and wealth ranking. To determine if the methods and tools presented in this section are appropriate, consider the broader research questions and inquiry design. In every case, the approach should be tailored to the study and context (e.g., substituting local materials for flip chart paper, etc.).

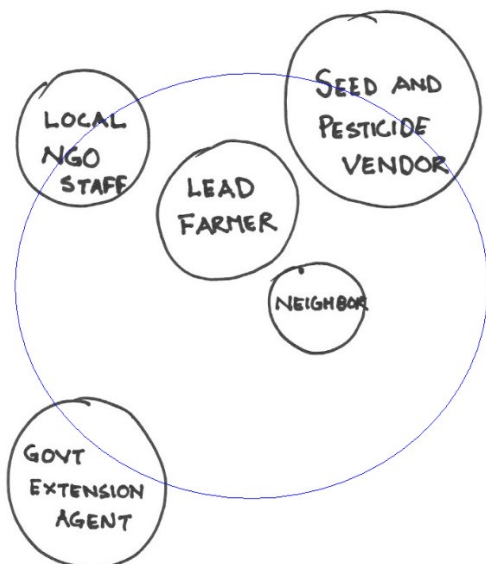
### VENN DIAGRAM

**Purpose:** Venn diagrams can be used to identify the organizations, groups, and individuals that are active in a community and how community members perceive the services they provide (e.g., accessibility, inclusion, quality, overall contribution), as well as how different providers interact with one another. For example, activities with an agriculture component often have interventions to strengthen agriculture extension systems. In this case, a Venn diagram, depicted in Figure 9, can be used to identify the primary sources of information and technical assistance related to agricultural inputs and markets in a community and the relative coverage and influence of the services provided. In the process of creating the diagram, questions around the quality or accessibility of services can be discussed and documented visually and in narrative form.

**Time required:** Average is usually 1–2 hours but can vary.

**Materials:** Flip chart paper and markers, scissors, glue, and colored papers to cut into circles of different sizes.

Figure 9. Example Venn diagram



**Process:**

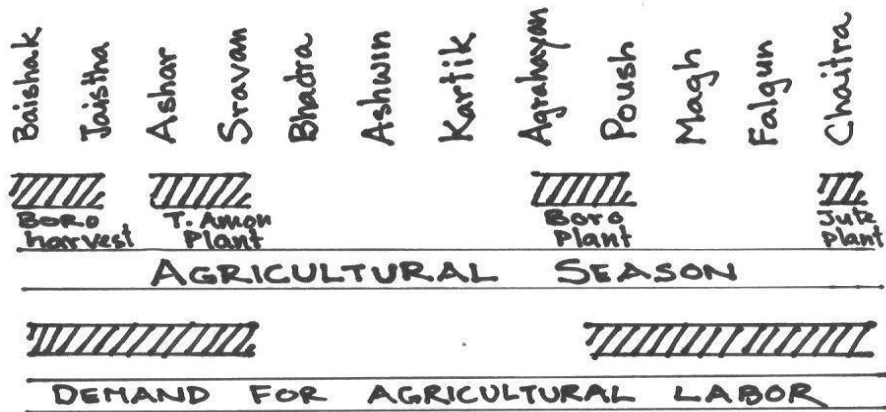
- Identify key questions related to the activity interventions that could be visually depicted in a Venn diagram and prepare a topical outline and discussion guide.
- Explain the objective of the exercise.
- Introduce the tool to the community and explain how it works.
- Begin a discussion on a specific topic that will be the focus of the discussion.
- Ask participants to name, for example, all the organizations, institutions, private vendors, and individuals from whom they get technical information. Write these sources down or engage a group participant in this role.
- Once you have listed all the sources, ask which is most important (i.e., whose advice is most effective) to them? After participants agree on the person/institution that is most important to them, cut a large circle of paper and write that name down. Then, ask who is second most important and cut a slightly smaller circle and write that name down. This way you write all the information/technical assistance sources on individual pieces of paper and cut circles, one source on each circle. The least important source will be written in the smallest circle. The size of the circle depends on the importance.
- Then ask participants which one is the most accessible service provider, for example (i.e., to whom most people go to for advice). Once the participants identify the most accessible source, place it in the center of a flip chart or other physical surface. The second most accessible source will be placed slightly away from the center. Do the same with each technical service provider, placing them in order of accessibility. The most accessible service provider will be in the center and the least accessible will be furthest from the center. If using a flip chart, paste the circles on the poster paper and/or take a photo of the diagram.
- At every stage ask, “Why?” Why do participants identify one organization/group/individual as more accessible compared to others? Why is one organization/group/individual more important to the community or to a particular group than others?
- Use the diagram and the information participants have shared to probe more deeply into the services provided: What are the benefits of services provided, for whom? What are costs, challenges, or gaps in service delivery? How do community members manage to fill these gaps? How have these services and the way they interact changed over time? Why?
- Explain to the group how the diagram will be used and, if feasible and appropriate, provide the participants with a printed or electronic copy.

The result of the exercise is a diagram depicting relationships between participants and the various actors that provide services of interest.

**SEASONAL CALENDAR**

**Purpose:** The seasonal calendar is an effective way to illustrate the relationship between various activities and seasonal changes. It can be used to design an activity and determine the most appropriate timing for interventions. In a focus group setting, participants identify the relevant categories of time (e.g., months, seasons, weeks) and set parameters, which may include rainfall, crop activities, labor and input availability and demand, pests and diseases, visits by extension workers, and social events, among others. Figure 10 provides an example of a seasonal calendar generated in Bangladesh, organized around the months of the Bengali calendar.

Figure 10. Example of a seasonal calendar from Bangladesh



**Time Required:** Approximately 2 hours.

**Materials:** Flip chart paper and colored markers.

**Process:**

- Identify key questions related to the topic of interest and develop a topical outline.
- Introduce the tool to the community and explain the objective of the exercise. Note, the seasonal calendar can be used during or after an FGD, or with a larger group to prompt discussion of seasonal activities. Explain the purpose of the seasonal calendar and discuss possible parameters; these will vary depending on the approach and the group involved. Limit the discussion to three or four critical parameters.
- Draw a time scale on the poster paper. Organize the calendar around categories used by the community members; in many communities, people use local calendars and local languages to designate time periods and seasons. Encourage participants to choose who will draw the calendar.
- Use lines or boxes to describe the seasonal variations of each parameter. The starting point does not have to be the beginning of the year. An agricultural calendar, for example, may begin with the time (or month) when most planting takes place. If necessary, a longer time period may be used. Proceed in this manner until the year is completed. Repeat for each parameter.
- Discuss the results, identifying the best/worst times of year to carry out an intervention, for example, and why this is the case.
- Explain how the calendar will be used and provide the participants with a printed or electronic copy.
- The calendar developed by one group can be consolidated with and checked against the results of other groups for consistency and reliability.

## COMMUNITY/SOCIAL MAP

**Purpose:** The community map, or social map, is typically used as a planning tool. It can provide critical information about the physical characteristics of a community, resources, key institutions, socio-economic conditions, and how people perceive access to resources and networks within their community, through spatial visualization. The map is usually drawn by community members either on the ground or on a large poster paper. See the example in Figure 11. The exercise often attracts much attention and generates useful debate among the mapmakers and onlookers alike. A map can also serve as a first step toward developing a wealth ranking, discussed below, by visually depicting the position of different types of households (or social strata) in a community.

Figure 11. Example of a social map



**Time required:** Approximately 2 hours.

**Materials:** Large poster paper and colored markers.

**Process:**

- Identify key questions and develop a topical outline to guide the exercise.
- Explain the objectives of the session to community participants. Typically, the map is drawn in a large group setting. You need to make sure that people from all areas and strata of the village are invited and participate in the session. This usually requires advance planning and clear communication with community leaders and facilitators about the activity and who you would like to participate.
- Identify enthusiastic volunteers or nominees from the group to draw.
- Introduce the exercise to the community and explain the process and expected outcome.
- Then ask the participants to draw a map of the community that shows every physical structure or resource of interest, this could include all households as well as buildings or sites that offer a particular service, such as schools, community centers, health clinics or healers, stores, religious buildings, water points, markets, gardens, popular meeting spots, shrines, cemeteries, etc. For orientation, it's helpful to start first by drawing roads and significant sites or geographic references or community boundaries.
- Encourage the group to discuss and show on the map where different groups of interest live in their community, such as ethnic groups, women-headed households, migrant groups or displaced people, or disabled people, and use a common symbol to identify these households. Discuss the groups of interest and ensure all participants have a common understanding of the characteristics of these groups; take notes on the discussion. Make sure that your copy of the map has a key explaining the different sites and symbols used on the map.
- Keep in mind that while the map is the physical outcome of the exercise, much of the insights you will gain derive from recording (with notes or audio recording, as appropriate and agreed to by participants) the discussion and observations of the group dynamic.

**Digital Participatory Mapping:** Community-based participatory mapping exercises can also be done using digital mapping tools (e.g., Google Earth Pro, MyMaps, Open Street Maps, etc.) to collect qualitative data about geographical histories, spatial narratives, and land rights. Narrative-based mapping can help us to better understand the lived experiences of communities by providing a detailed picture of participants'

current living conditions, needs, and aspirations. Participatory mapping can also be used to identify gaps in aid delivery and support targeted interventions. Digital participatory mapping is typically done in groups through projecting mapping imagery onto a wall as participants collectively identify important places, environmental resources, and transportation or migration routes, etc. The interviewer then plots the locations onto a map using place markers. Some digital mapping platforms may also have the ability to add icons, photos, audio, and videos to the map.

**Time required:** Approximately 2–3 hours to complete.

**Materials:** May include laptop or tables with mapping software installed, projectors, digital video camera, microphone, recorders, etc.

**Process:**

- Identify key questions and develop a topical outline to guide the mapping exercise.
- Prior to beginning the mapping exercise, download and install mapping software, and prepare your map. In some cases, before going to the field, you will need to cache the mapping data for use offline due to the limited cellular network and internet availability in remote locations. Additionally, it is best to prepare the map before going to the field by labeling a few landmarks (rivers, lakes, mountains, etc.) prior to showing the map to interviewees. This will help guide them and help them identify major landmarks.
- Prepare the interview space and equipment ahead of time (e.g., setting up the projector). You may also need a pre-prepared list of place names to help guide the search.
- Once you are ready to begin mapping, introduce the exercise to the community and explain the process and expected outcomes.
- Take time to allow participants to get familiar with the map, first exploring and finding familiar places. Ask participants guiding questions to identify important resources and places. Use place markers to record the locations and add notes in the description field for each site identified.
- As participants identify important resources in their community, place pins on the map to mark locations. Additionally, lines can be used to draw pathways to represent a route taken or be used to measure distances from one location to another or between two features on the map. Polygons can also be added to demarcate a region, area, or neighborhood, etc. Place names and labels identify objects. Finally, rich media such as icons, photos, digital drawings, or video can be added to the place markers to annotate map objects.
- Record the details of the group interview (participants' IDs, interview date, location, recording info, etc.) in a spreadsheet or the interview guide.
- Be sure to save the mapping data regularly throughout the interview. Copy and save all digital audio and video files to your laptop/computer.
- Close the community mapping exercise by thanking the participants, explaining how their insights will be used, and how you will provide them with a copy of the final map.

**Resources:**

- DeRoy, S. (2016). *Direct-To-Digital Mapping Methodology: A Hands-on Guidebook for Applying Google Earth*. The Firelight Group.
- Al-haddad, R.E., & Rakshit, P. V. (2023) [Finding home: Participatory geospatial mapping with Rohingya refugees](#). *Applied Geography* 161, Article 103136. ISSN 0143-6228.

## WEALTH RANKING

**Purpose:** The purpose of this exercise is to identify the main social strata that exist in a community and to understand the criteria (or indicators) community members use to differentiate categories of perceived wealth or wellbeing. This information helps in developing an intervention strategy, drawing on community perceptions of wellbeing, without carrying out a complex socio-economic study. The tool is intended for use with a group that includes people from all corners of a community. A wealth ranking, shown in F, can also be used to target interventions within a community.

Table 4. Example of wealth ranking

CLASS	CRITERIA	No. of HOUSEHOLDS
<b>“Better-off”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owners of at least 2.8 ha. of irrigated land</li> <li>• Businesspeople</li> <li>• People who work outside the community</li> </ul>	28
<b>“Middle group”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owners of fewer than 2.8 ha. and more than 0.7</li> <li>• Factory workers</li> <li>• Wage workers</li> </ul>	28
<b>“Poor”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owners of less than 0.7 ha.</li> <li>• Keep animals</li> <li>• Wage workers</li> </ul>	52
<b>“Very poor”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landless</li> <li>• Keep only pigs</li> <li>• Occasional workers</li> </ul>	10

**Time required:** Estimated 2–3 hours.

**Materials:** Large sheet of paper, flip chart, or writing board, notecards, and markers; pebbles or other small objects that can be used to represent households.

**Process:**

- There are various approaches to carry out a wealth ranking.
- One approach to this exercise is to first engage participants in a discussion about what characteristics may be attributed to someone who is considered wealthy in the community, e.g., number of livestock, landholding, type of housing structure or livelihood, business owner or entrepreneur, salaried person, someone receiving remittances from a relative abroad, level of education, quantity or quality of meals consumed each day, etc.
- Next, using these same characteristics, ask for a description of those considered very poor. Then, all those in between, differentiating within this middle group the characteristics of those that may be closer to those that are very poor and the better-off. Typically, groups identify three to five wealth categories.
- Facilitators should refrain from expressing an opinion regarding the classification.
- Draw a table on the flip chart or large paper, with a row for each category, as depicted in Table 4.

- Using small stones or objects, ask the group to allocate an actual number of objects (in the case of a census) or a representative proportion of objects to each row in the table.
- This approach encourages participants to reflect on categories of wellbeing and provides an estimation (or count) of households in a community that fall within these categories.
- A second approach, which may be appropriate for community targeting, for example, is to combine wealth ranking with a social map of the community, described above.
- After the group determines criteria for different wealth categories in the community, create a map of the community that depicts all households and includes a name or nickname for the head of household.
- Rather than using stones or other objects to divide households in a general way, give each wealth or wellbeing group a number or unique symbol.
- Then, ask the group to write the number or symbol for the appropriate wealth group next to each house drawn on the social map.
- For the purposes of targeting, facilitators should take notes to record household names and wealth category. It will also be important to triangulate the information with other sources of information (e.g., recipients of cash transfers or food assistance). Note that these categories of wealth may change over time as people become less or more vulnerable and it will be important to update and verify the information.
- Importantly, facilitators should discuss with community members whether or not this approach is appropriate and useful for a given community. In some areas, people are more comfortable with the first approach, in which wealth groups are discussed in general terms. In other cases, an activity such as this provides an open forum for transparent targeting of interventions and resource transfers, which can contribute to community cohesion.
- After the wealth ranking exercise is complete, ask the participants to comment on the criteria they used to classify households. You may ask what makes these households better off. Ask participants to explain the differences between each group and note their views. Do all members of the community feel the same? Would they use different classifications? Communities may value human and social capital as much as—or more than—physical capital. For example, in some communities a schoolteacher is placed in a higher socio-economic class even if she/he does not have the physical assets that are required for that class. Therefore, it is important to query a broad array of criteria that community members use to classify different socio-economic groups.



## PHOTOVOICE

**Purpose:** PhotoVoice is a qualitative approach that centers on the perspectives of participants (or beneficiaries of a program). PhotoVoice was originally established as a visual and participatory action research methodology in the 1990s to promote creative expression and social change. Described by its creators as “a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique,” it is a qualitative, community-based participatory approach that aims to document the reality of marginalized populations.<sup>39</sup> In PhotoVoice, photographs essentially serve as a prompt to stimulate discussion, develop critical thinking, and encourage listening to peers while at the same time bridging the gap between community and decision-makers. Using PhotoVoice alongside other traditional methodologies allows for data triangulation, giving a comprehensive analysis and understanding of program strengths and weaknesses. For more resources on PhotoVoice, see the International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS) [Lessons Learned Piloting PhotoVoice in Complex Settings for Qualitative Inquiry](#) report and PhotoVoice facilitator’s guide.

**Time required:** 6–8-week implementation period. (Note: this method is better suited for ongoing qualitative monitoring (QM) over the course of an activity rather than for a one-off qualitative study (QS).)

**Materials:** Either camera phones or disposable cameras.

### Process:

- **Step 1: Select location and implementing partners.** In this step, you must select the locations for conducting the PhotoVoice methodology and the implementing partner organizations to work with. To do so, first conduct a detailed desk review of existing literature on the application of PhotoVoice in other contexts and review the methodology’s key steps to better understand how it can be adapted and contextualized for your program’s specific operating conditions and safety and security requirements. You will also want to conduct a risk assessment of location and operating conditions prior to selecting sites for implementation. Once sites are selected, conduct discussions with IPs to explain the purpose, objectives, and limitations of the PhotoVoice methodology and work with headquarter/home office/country program teams to identify roles and responsibilities between researchers and implementing partners.
- **Step 2: Facilitator selection and training materials.** This step includes developing contextualized PhotoVoice training materials for both the facilitators and participants and then recruiting and training local PhotoVoice facilitators. The PhotoVoice methodology should be modified to fit the language and cultural context you are working in. It is important to select local facilitators who understand and come from the community where participants live (consider age, gender, and cultural identities). Once facilitators are selected, conduct detailed training(s) for facilitators in their language, emphasizing participant-driven research, informed consent, and safety and security issues. Training(s) may span 2–3 days and include core humanitarian standards of conducting monitoring and evaluation work.
- **Step 3: Select and train PhotoVoice participants.** First, determine the sampling method (i.e., purposive sampling) and the minimum conditions that will be needed for participants to participate in the project. Determine a mutually convenient time and location to train participants (led by the local facilitators) in their communities. Training may be done in a 1–2 day period, being mindful not to place burdens on participant’s time but giving enough opportunity to fully understand the methodology.
- **Step 4: Implement Photovoice.** Agree on weekly or bi-weekly times to meet, discuss, and share photos taken. Agree on how to share photos among the group (e.g., WhatsApp channel) and key safety and security considerations. During sharing sessions, reflect on photos taken as a group, and

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<sup>39</sup> Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1997). [PhotoVoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment](#). *Health Education & Behavior* 24(3), 369–87.



have participants identify common themes. Continue to actively assess and mitigate risks to ensure safety and security for all participants. Have participants decide who to share the photos with and how (e.g., presentation with printed photos to the implementing partner during a routine meeting). Finally, analyze the results of PhotoVoice, including an analysis of identified common themes from the photos, conduct a follow-up survey with participants to capture their feedback on the methodology and interview IPs to determine the degree to which they used or intend to use information generated from the methodology.

**Resource:** International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS). (2023). [\*PhotoVoice Facilitator's Guide\*](#).

## Annex 5. Sample Topical Outline Questions

Below are a few sample sets of topical outline questions for common interventions implemented in RFSAs. These questions are illustrative and do not represent a full topical outline. Note, questions in the outline must be grounded in the local context, concepts, and language, in consultation with M&E and program staff, or other knowledgeable stakeholders. Always keep in mind that while the topical outline is intended to flow in a logical order, it is *not* a script. Rather it is a guide used to facilitate a conversation; topics may not—and most likely won’t—be covered in the order presented in the outline.

### Food Access and Utilization

1. Please tell me/us about the “food security” situation in your community.
  - Do you think accessing food is a problem in your community? Why?
  - What factors might trigger food insecurity? How could this situation be improved?
2. Please tell me/us a little bit about the typical eating habits here in your community?
  - Do these patterns change at particular times of the year (rainy vs. dry seasons; lean vs. harvest seasons)?
  - What are the primary foods that families would have consumed in the last week? Does this change during different seasons?
3. What do you think is the primary reason for the lack of food at particular times of year? What times of year does that happen? And during those times, are there changes in the eating patterns of particular household members (differences by age, gender, work status, etc.)?
4. Where does the majority of food consumed come from (are they purchased, produced, or provided by another source)? Has that changed over time? Does that change through different seasons?
5. Are there any customs, traditions, or beliefs that involve food in your community?
  - For example, is there a period in which people fast, or eat a particular food type, or avoid a particular food type?
  - Are there beliefs that interfere with breastfeeding?
  - Are there beliefs as to the kinds of foods children need when they are sick?

### Nutritional Status of Women and Children

1. How do caregivers of children assess the child nutrition situation in their households and in the community?
  - Do they think that malnutrition is prevalent or that it’s not that big of a problem?
  - If they realize the existence of this problem, do they understand the implications of child malnutrition, especially that of chronic malnutrition like stunting for children under 5 years old?
2. Do you know if any development agencies have recently (in the last 3–4 years) tried to address this problem? What did they do? What needs to be done to address this problem more effectively?
3. What are the typical foods consumed by children in your community, in the following age groups: 0–5 months, 6–23 months, and 24–59 months? *Probe for the following:*
  - How do you assess the adequacy of foods consumed?
  - What are barriers to an adequate diet for children?
  - Are there any differences in feeding practices between the male and female children?

- What has been done by you or your community to improve children’s diet recently (in the last 3–4 years)?
  - What else needs to be done?
4. Tell me/us about the situation for women in your community. Do they have enough food to eat?
    - What kind of households are likely to have malnourished women?
    - What are the factors that might contribute to poor nutrition among the adult women?
    - Is malnourishment among the adult women believed to be a serious problem? Why or why not?
    - What has been done to decrease women’s malnutrition recently (last 2–3 years)? What still needs to be done?
  5. What has been done to address food insecurity in the community? By whom, for whom?
  6. Are there any past food security programs implemented by the government, foreign donors, or community-based organizations?
    - If so, please tell me a little bit about your experiences with those programs.
    - What were some of the strengths of those programs? And weaknesses?

#### **Access to and Utilization of Healthcare**

1. Do women in the community typically receive pre- and ante-natal care? What does this care consist of? Who provides this care?
2. Are there particular patterns related to birth in this community?
3. Are there particular patterns related to breastfeeding in this community?
  - When do individuals typically start breastfeeding their children (at what age/stage)? At what age/stage do individuals typically stop breastfeeding? Do women typically make this decision? If the men do play a role in this decision-making process, please explain their role.
  - At what point do children stop breastfeeding and other liquids and/or food are introduced? Why is breastfeeding stopped?
  - Are there particular cultural beliefs in this community that influence the practice of breastfeeding?
  - Are local health workers trained on the benefits and practice of breastfeeding? Do they teach? And what do they teach?
4. What types of healthcare services are available to community members?
  - Where are they? How far must individuals travel or how long does it take to reach a health center?
  - How do individuals access them?
  - When (under what circumstances) do community members typically access those facilities?
  - Who in families makes the primary decisions regarding health care?
5. How does the community perceive healthcare providers? Why? Is there trust/fear of healthcare providers? Why?
6. What are some of the patterns in illnesses that individuals in this community face? What kinds of illnesses are there? Are there variances by age, sex, socio-economic status, or other demographic characteristics?

7. Is there a practice of vaccinating children in the community? For what purpose? How do community members make decisions to vaccinate or not vaccinate children? How are children vaccinated?
8. Does the community lack any needed kind of medicine? Or other sources of healthcare? Please tell me about that situation.

## Annex 6. Qualitative Data Entry Matrix Template

For each qualitative interview, the notetakers and interviewers/facilitators work together to enter raw notes into a simple matrix that aligns with the topical outline. For matrix-based analysis, the researchers aggregate notes from each data collection event into a master matrix, synthesizing and organizing the full data set. The sample data entry matrix below provides space in the first row of data entry to record general information on the group composition and dynamic that may be helpful in the analysis. It also includes a column (on the far right) to record observations or insights shared by the interview team. This information does not come directly from the informant or FGD participants but provides additional contextual information that may be useful for the analysis. This example is illustrative; it is not a complete data entry template.

Table 5. Qualitative data entry matrix

Part 1:

<b>Facilitator</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Notetaker</b>		<b>Time Start</b>	
<b>State</b>		<b>Time End</b>	
<b>District</b>		<b>Gender: M /F</b>	
<b>Community</b>		<b># of participants</b>	

Part 2:

<b>Topic*</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Researcher Comments, Insight, Observations</b>
<b>Group composition</b> (types of participants—e.g., youth, elders, leaders, disabled, IDPs/hosts/other; setting; interview context; group dynamic)		
<b>Main livelihoods and local market activities</b> (actors/who does what—women, men, youth, elderly, IDPs, hosts, returnees; why; what has or is changing; why/dynamics; barriers, constraints, or opportunities)		
<b>Shocks and Stresses</b> (primary/drivers, secondary/downstream; characteristics; effects on community, different effects on different groups; change/dynamics)		

\*This template is illustrative. Revise the topics and expand rows to align with interview guides.

## Annex 7. Daily Debrief Template

The daily debrief template is a simple tool team leads can use to help guide discussions with the field teams after each day of data collection. Daily debriefs with data collection teams offer an opportunity to reflect on the data collection process so that teams can assess their progress and data quality assurance on a daily basis. Field teams can then use the information shared in these discussions to improve the process for the next day of data collection, to identify key and emergent findings, and identify information gaps that need more attention during field work. This sample template should be adapted to the specific qualitative inquiry and applied to the extent it is useful for the team. The template is not to be used to enter individual interview data.

### Qualitative Study (QS) 1 Data Collection

Date:	Interview Location(s):
<b>Supervisor:</b>	
<b>Debrief notetaker:</b>	
<b>Team members:</b>	
<b>Types and number of Interviews today:</b>	

Question/Topic	Issues	Solutions /Follow-up Needed
<b>1. Data Collection Process</b>		
<b>1.1. Participants:</b> Organizing key informants, getting consent, finding private space for interviews, locating the appropriate key informants (or finding replacements), gaining trust, making sure people have sufficient time to meet with you.		
<b>1.2. Tools:</b> Do people understand the questions? Are interviews too long, are participants getting bored or restless, or not responding? Are interviewers able to keep the interview on track?		
<b>1.3. Logistics support:</b> Recording, notetaking, schedule changes, other		
<b>1.4 Challenges and solutions:</b> Are there any other challenges the team encountered in data collection today? E.g., timing, flow, facilitation, notetaking, probing, distractions, etc. How can we address these challenges?		

Question/Topic	Highlights and Important Points from Today
<b>2. Topical Outlines: Mother Care Groups</b>	
<b>2.1. Observations</b> – Interesting observations in the community? How does it relate to resilience (for example, markets, infrastructure, water sources, etc.)? How did your observations support or contradict what participants said?	
<b>2.2. Data Quality</b> – Are you getting information on all of the topics? Describe any information that is missing. Where are the gaps in information? What topics need more probing? How do we fill the information gaps?	
<b>2.3 Data Validation</b> – Are all team members hearing the same information? Is there contradictory information? How do we address contradictory information?	
<b>2.4 Common Issues</b> – What common issues and themes are emerging? What are the major differences between groups or locations?	

Question/Topic	Key Highlights or Information of Interest from Today
<b>Changes in livelihood strategies over the life of the activity</b> (for all topics, are there variations across women/men/youth?):	
<b>Changes in DRR perceptions or activities:</b>	
<b>Changes in nutritional security for CU2:</b>	
<b>Changes in sanitation capacity at healthcare facilities:</b>	
....	
....	
....	

Key Research Questions: <i>Check daily to see if your data is answering these questions; note and address any information gaps.</i>
1. ....
2. ....
3. ....

## Annex 8. Sample Data Analysis Matrices

The matrices below provide examples of how data from multiple sites or data collection events can be organized and entered into a simple matrix. Table 6 shows how the data can then be sorted into categories of interest and filtered to analyze data by thematic category (e.g., livelihood activities, shocks, and stresses) or by disaggregates, indicated in dark blue at the top of the matrix (e.g., by state, urban or rural, male or female). Table 7 provides an example of how the data has been summarized from the data entry matrices (shown in [Annex 6](#)) to an analysis matrix that includes information from multiple sites or sources. Both examples are for FGDs and can be adapted for KIIs; and they are abbreviated for illustrative purposes. In general, the thematic categories in the analysis matrix will follow from and align with the categories established in the topical outlines for a qualitative inquiry. Remember, in all cases, the cells expand to meet the needs of the inquiry and data set.

Table 6. Sample data analysis matrix template

State	Any state	Any state	Any state
Site	Any town	Any town	Any town
Urban/Rural	Rural	Rural	Urban/ Peri-urban
KM from main town	75	75	5
Main activity interventions	VSLAs, Garden Groups, WASH	Farmer Groups, DRR Training	Youth vocational training, water point improvement
# FGD participants	7	6	6
M/F	Female	Male	Female
Main livelihood activities and change over time			
Shocks and stresses			
Community response to shock/stress			
Financial services /savings/VSLAs			
Garden/Farmer Groups			
WASH/Water point improvement			
DRR			
Youth vocational training			
Reliance on others/social capital			
Gender dynamics			
Participation in groups			
COVID-19			
Summary Themes			



Table 7. Sample data analysis matrix, with summary content for the category “Livelihoods”

State	Any state	Any state	Any state
Site	Any town	Any town	Any town
Population	259	1335	1335
Urban/Rural	Urban	Rural	Rural
Km to county seat	10	300	300
Activity intensity level	<i>HIGH-HIGH</i>	<i>HIGH-MEDIUM</i>	<i>HIGH-MEDIUM</i>
Number of interventions	7	5	5
Group Composition			
M/F	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Livelihoods/community overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple generations within one HH—reliant on daily wage labor</li> <li>• Education widespread—children generally (boys and girls) attending school (although in past girls didn't attend school)</li> <li>• People selling vegetables, milk, eggs, charcoal</li> <li>• Kitchen gardens maintained secretly—water scarcity water restrictions in place</li> <li>• Men motorcycle drivers</li> <li>• Women participate in VSLAs (savings though women's groups)</li> <li>• Community banking Islam compliant</li> <li>• Changes in gender roles—women now educated and income earners</li> <li>• Women as "single mothers"—denotes prostitution; negative coping strategies to meet daily needs</li> <li>• Changes in technology (mobile phones) and market participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Livestock (est. 90% of HH) primarily cattle and goats &amp; sheep, some camels</li> <li>• Pasture management—HH have 50 cattle and 30 goats, on average—traditional management system to rotate pasture, decrease disease and pests, but herd size decreased due to recurrent drought</li> <li>• Employment as herders—paid monthly</li> <li>• Youth motorcycle transport (reportedly increases HH income and prevents youth drug use)</li> <li>• Resources, assets—good pasture, rivers with sufficient water for sand harvesting, seasonal (rainy season) rivers for livestock</li> <li>• Pastoral migration maintained with collective decision making—traditional pastoral system—maintaining pasture land into the future over time</li> <li>• Change in division of labor—children going to school, parents in charge of livestock</li> <li>• Women can own livestock, men = sales decision makers (livestock and livestock products)</li> <li>• Women involved in livestock business &amp; management</li> <li>• Diversification w/ small business especially women: Perception of minimal diversification (e.g. one breed of livestock)</li> <li>• Outside assistance = temporary drought relief</li> <li>• WFP food aid and cash transfer program; relief food includes maize, beans, cooking oil, porridge flour, yellow peas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of salaried employment rate low (&lt;5%)—formal employment for chiefs and teachers</li> <li>• Some diversification into small retail including sale of khat, vegetables, butchery, firewood collection, housing materials</li> <li>• Mining: 18km away (not mentioned in men's group) mine attracting migrants from other states</li> <li>• Livestock-related activities = primary livelihood (slaughter, herders)</li> <li>• Land is community-owned, not individual property rights</li> <li>• Water scarcity: 7km away from one borehole—shared with other communities/villages—takes 1 hour to walk—Lack of water is the major problem in this community.</li> <li>• Since decentralization—little infrastructure improvement no water improvement</li> <li>• Access to finance: women's groups, one formal bank, and mobile banking agents in the area—¾ of HHs have accounts of some kind with banks and cooperatives, have to go to nearest town to access bank</li> </ul>

## Coding in a Manual Matrix

There are various ways to code data in a manual matrix. Some of these techniques include:

**Color coding:** The most common type of coding is using colored fonts to highlight key issues/topics. For example, use **red** font for information on shocks and stresses, **green** font for coping strategies, **purple** for nutrition, **blue** for food security, etc. Similarly, you can fill entire cells using different colors for each theme. This allows you to easily identify key themes across the data. Additionally, you can use the *Sort & Filter* function in Excel to sort columns of data by their format, including by cell color, font color, or icon set. To do this in Excel, under the *Data* tab on the ribbon at the top, use the **Sort & Filter function > Custom sort**. See detailed [instructions here](#).

**Keyword coding:** Another coding method is using the *Data Validation* function to create **drop-down lists** with short descriptive labels to create coding categories of keywords or phrases for each response. Drop-down lists enable users to choose a single selection in a list of predefined items. Thus, once you create a drop-down list, you can pick from the drop-down list and assign a “code” or category to each response. Drop-down lists also help sort and filter the data, allowing you to more easily compare subsets of your data. In Excel, you can use the *Sort & Filter* function to show a subset of the data and hide the rest. This allows you to focus on the relevant portion of data you are analyzing. Selecting the *Clear filter* function will redisplay all of the data. See detailed [instructions here](#). Another benefit to using drop-down lists for coding is that they can automatically calculate the number of times a keyword or phrase was used by utilizing the *=COUNTIF* function in Excel. This allows for a semi-quantitative count of certain instances of keywords or themes. This method is similar to running a word frequency query in other qualitative software programs. Word counts can then be used for data visualizations such as word clouds or heat maps.

However, when using word counts, be wary of the temptation to quantify your qualitative data. It is very tempting to do this, but it is important to remember that qualitative data is narrative rather than numerical. Moreover, the sample size is not statistically significant and interview questions, while determined before interviews begin, are not prescriptive. Thus, the percentage of respondents indicating ‘x or y’, for example, has no real value/meaning for qualitative findings. While findings cannot be generalized across a wider population, word/phrase counts can give you a broad idea of which themes or topics are mentioned more often than others (e.g., which shocks experienced are more salient than others).

- **Avoid quantifying data:** “74% of participants reported the cash interventions had caused division among community members due to perceived favoritism in distribution.”
- **Good practice in reporting:** “Many/most/majority of participants reported the cash interventions caused division among community members due to perceived favoritism in distribution.” Then follow the statement with a direct quote that best articulates the findings.

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<sup>40</sup> See: Vanover, C., Mihas, P., & Saldana, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Analyzing and Interpreting Qualitative Research: After the Interview*. SAGE Publications.

Table 8. Sample Excel data analysis matrix using drop-down lists for keyword coding

State	Community Site	Interview Type	Interview Date	Gender	# of Participant(s)	Broad Topic (from TO tool)	CODES Themes/Sub-topics	Specific data input/comment
A	example U	FGD	9/19/2023	Male	6	Shocks and stresses	Inflation, Business, Reduced consumption, Food Insecurity/Hunger, Access to land	<p><b>Inflation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over the last 2 years, businesses reduced and changed the type of goods they sell</li> <li>- Customers can afford much less than they used to.</li> <li>- IJs have reduced the quantity and quality of food they eat.</li> </ul>
B	example V	FGD	9/21/2023	Female	10	Shocks and stresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to land</li> <li>Access to markets</li> <li>Access to water</li> <li>Agriculture</li> <li>Banditry</li> <li>Banks</li> <li>Boko Haram</li> <li>Business</li> <li>Cash transfer</li> <li>Child protection</li> <li>Climate change mitigation</li> <li>Climate shocks</li> <li>Disease</li> </ul>	<p><b>Heavy rainfall:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Falls late, and most crops were destroyed because of rough water.</li> <li>- When it comes it falls so heavy that it results in the destruction of <b>so many houses</b> because most the houses in the community are built with mud (sand) whenever a wall falls, they lose their valuables to rooms that have not been reinforced. When the whole building is destroyed, they are helped by friends or relatives within the community until they build their houses within the community.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cholera outbreak:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Every rainy season there is usually an outbreak of cholera in the community.</li> <li>- Children were taken to the hospital for proper treatment and management, people in the community were sensitized on the importance of personal hygiene so as to prevent contracting the disease.</li> </ul>
C	example X	KII - C	9/18/2023	Male	1	Activities	Farming, Farming, Savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He <b>works with six farmers and savings group members of a women farmers' cooperative. He teaches them (the farmers) on good agricultural practices (GAP)</b> how to clear the land, seeds selection, spacing, use of insecticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, their positive effects when used in the right way and their negative effects when use in excess.</li> <li>• The <b>savings groups members</b> are contributing weekly, and at the end of the year they share the money among themselves.</li> </ul>

The red arrow in the matrix points to the expanded drop-down list function, which can be used to develop codes for standard responses and themes in your data set. Note that this is a truncated matrix intended to illustrate the drop-down function. You can download the full Excel matrix [here](#).