MODULE 5
Situation Analysis for Communication Strategy

This module covers situation analysis, the first step in the design of communication for development strategies. It provides students with tools to conduct situation assessments that are informed by participatory, human-rights principles, and to analyse data to guide strategic decisions.
Key Competencies

After this module, students should be able to demonstrate the following competencies:

- Knowledge of basic methodologies to produce situation analysis for communication for development programmes
- Critical analysis of key concepts and models
- Draft and implement situation analysis plans
- Analyse data
- Draw strategic implications of situation analysis

Unit 1  The socio-ecological model and situation analysis
Unit 2  Literature review
Unit 3  Formative research
Unit 4  Participatory research
Unit 5  Qualitative methods
Unit 6  Quantitative methods
Unit 7  Analysing and reporting data
Unit 8  Evaluation and research
According to the socio-ecological model (SEM), any given development/social issue needs to be analysed in a multi-dimensional context. Development challenges are affected by obstacles and opportunities at various levels: individual, community, social and systems/structural. As a reaction against psychological model that assumed that obstacles and actions primarily lie at the level of the individual, the SEM stresses the importance of the social and political environment. SEM is not a theory, in the sense that it does not provide explanations or predictions about what causes affect/explain specific problems or how they need to be addressed. Nor does SEM provide a series of action guidelines – what to do and how. Instead, it is an explanatory model that offers insights into levels that need to be considered to produce nuanced assessments of a given situation. This approach assumes that there is no single factor that determines behaviours and, that broad social change is needed to promote long-lasting transformations. These levels are not independent from each other, but rather, they are nestled in ways that they collectively affect a problem. So, any given problem – let us say low enrolment of girls in primary schools or poor hand washing – is embedded in multiple factors that need to be carefully analysed.

The literature has given different names to the different levels which fall within the four broad categories of individual, interpersonal/community, society, structural/policy. The individual level refers to attitude, knowledge, beliefs, emotions, perceived risk and norms, personal skills, and self-efficacy. The interpersonal/community level includes relationships with family, friends, and peers - the social networks of influence and information sharing that regularly affect people’s beliefs, choices, and knowledge. The social level refers to socio-economic conditions, social norms, social capital (institutions and values), large-scale forms of information dissemination, collective efficacy, and social trends. The structural level refers to legislation and policies underpinning certain practices as well as social services (e.g. geographical access, cost, quality).
Because there is no agreement on the levels, various graphics have been proposed to represent the SEM. Below are three illustrative samples.

Source: Centers for Disease Control, United States

Source: UNICEF
Despite different names and number of levels, these graphics reveal important similarities, namely, a growing consensus in C4D about the need to address social, political and economic dimensions beyond individual factors. By placing individuals within their social environment and assuming the existence of complex interrelationships among factors, the SEM overcomes problems of traditional psychological approaches and calls for sophisticated analysis. The wide acceptance and use of the SEM across human development programmes globally indicates an important shift in the conceptualisation of social problems and social change. It calls attention to understanding a string of interrelated causes and actions. Whereas, it opens up the analysis to social and political aspects, the SEM does not provide straight guidelines about strategic decisions and steps. It is an analytical tool, not a blueprint for action. It gives us a systemic view of a given problem. Research findings based on the SEM need to be considered to determine opportunities, likely changes, and points of entry into the system.

The SEM offers a framework to produce a situation analysis that describes specific development issues that the programme aims to address, such as childhood disease, malnutrition, child trafficking, maternal mortality, children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, or inadequate safe water and sanitation. The situation analysis should be based on data from research, programme documents and local knowledge. This information will be similar to that already included in the situation analysis of the programme. In addition to analysing immediate aspects of the problem, including the underlying social and cultural issues, the analysis should also describe what social structures and practices could contribute to desirable change.

The situation analysis should include only that information which is pertinent to the communication objectives, and should cover key aspects in a few pages:

- Overview of the problem
- Pertinent instruments for addressing the problems at global/regional/local levels; country-specific description of the problem using available data, programme documents and local knowledge
- Extent to which people are affected by the problem (e.g. how many people are affected by HIV/AIDS, what the school dropout rate is, how many children remain without immunization)
- Underlying causes of development problem to get an in-depth picture of the particular behaviours (i.e. what are people doing/not doing) that are contributing to the problem
- Suggest from the data WHY people behave as they do
- Research on current knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs among participant groups relevant to the development issue
- Look into the socio-cultural and economic factors maintaining existing behaviours, both positive and negative behaviours. This answers the “why” question. If the objective of a programme is to stop a harmful practice such as child marriage or
Situation Analysis

hiring child labour, it is important to discuss not only the harmful effects of the practice, but also who benefits and how (e.g. how families benefit from child marriage, how child labour contributes to the well-being of the family/employers). To be effective, the communication strategy will need to address both benefits and risks from harmful practices as well as the barriers to the adoption of positive practices. Break this description into intermediate, underlying and basic causes if it helps organise the information.

- Communication practices and places where people discuss issues related to the problem at stake

Questions for Discussion

- What are the main assumptions of the socio-ecological model?
- What are the strengths and limitation of the model?
- What examples illustrate the main assumptions of the model?
- How does the model guide situation assessments?
Reading List


Optional Readings


Case Study


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Explain principles of socio-ecological model.
- Draft situation assessment plan based on SEM.
- Produce situation analysis based on SEM principles.
- Undertake critical analysis of data gathered using SEM ideas.
- Determine the implications of findings for strategic actions.
Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. Discuss the applicability of the socio-ecological model to the analysis of a given development challenge. Explore factors that affect the problems (namely, the range of social determinants) and ways that it could be addressed by taking a multilevel approach.

2. Present a case that used the SEM to produce situation assessment and strategies.

3. Discuss ways to decide/recommend actions based on SEM situation analysis. What are points of entry into a given problem that is affected by multiple causes?

Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
- Case study discussion
Literature Review

General Introduction

A situation analysis needs to start with a good understanding of existing knowledge about the problem as well as past actions to deal with similar development problems. This is important to avoid various mistakes such as assuming that problems are new, ignoring previous efforts, and failing to incorporate lessons learned in a strategic manner. Conducting a literature review is important to capitalise on existing knowledge, take advantage of successes, and stay clear from past mistakes. Strategic design needs to be built on “the shoulders of giants” - past experiences and programmes who offer insights into causes and solutions to a given challenge. No single development problem is strictly new. Not only it may have been addressed before, but it is likely to be linked to a broad set of issues. Education, health, or environmental challenges, to name a few, are connected to a broad set of social issues.

The literature review should not be the conventional exercise in academic scholarship that identifies arguments and gaps in previous research to set up a theoretical and/or research question. Here, the interest is different in that, it uses knowledge for action. The purpose is to assess the academic literature and programmatic experiences to guide practice. This certainly includes academic literature, but the way this body of work is read and interpreted differs from academic scholarship. It is important to approach the literature review strategically in terms of assessing what is known about a given issue and to analyse accumulated knowledge and perspectives in order to inform programmatic directions.

The first step is to conduct research about the literature on a given topic. It could be a broad – maternal health, disaster prevention, digital literacy – or specific search – what motivates families to have children immunized or keep girls in school, or successful ways in which couples discuss reproductive health. The key theme and question should be clear in order to select relevant readings. Certainly, exploratory research may be needed at an early stage – what has been written and done on a given topic. But the search should be guided by a clear interest – “what do we know and what are the arguments about” a certain subject.
The sources can be original, empirical, published accounts; scholarly and journalistic articles; existing literature reviews; meta-analysis of the findings; “gray” literature such as programmatic documents and reports; and others. Because the sources are multiple, it is important not to lose sight of the key interest. What we are trying to do is understand a problem better, based on what people have already studied, and to assess ways in which problems have been successfully (or not) addressed, even if the community/context is different. Even if collected articles are different in terms of methodology, sampling, scope, and other dimensions, it may be worth including them in the review. This could provide a broader picture about “the state-of-the-art” and help identify differences and similarities. A good rule of thumb is that recent, solid writings/research provides valuable, retrospective insights as they had to go through a similar process of assessing previous knowledge. Again, the purpose is not to judge the conceptual or methodological merits of available research/writings, but rather to find out what can be learned from them to bring into a new programme.

Once the literature is collected, the next step is to analyse the information collected. Two questions should guide the analysis/interpretation:

- What does the literature say about a problem? Causes? Consequences?
- What does the literature say about interventions that have tackled the same or similar problem? Results?

The analysis should aim to identify central themes in the literature, and positions/arguments about causes and solutions. Here are some questions that may help guide the analysis: What evidence exists about a problem? What arguments have been made about the causes of the problem? What are their programmatic implications? What evidence is presented? Are the case studies comparable? What has worked? What has failed? Are arguments generalisable – applicable beyond one single case? How do we know? Have arguments been tested? What propositions come out of the analysis? What are the gaps? What do we still do not know for certain or lack sufficient evidence to draw categorical conclusions?

The final step is to draft the review in a way that highlights the main arguments and their practical implications. Here, it is important to determine to what extent knowledge/experiences about other cases are relevant to the specific focus of a programme. For example, existing research and arguments about environmental education in rural schools may not translate to urban settings, or lessons about child nutrition in settings with ample access to a diversity of foods may not apply to context with limited choices, and so on. This is why it is important to weigh the relevance of results and positions across the literature and cases.

The closing section should consist of practical, specific recommendations for communication planning coming out of the literature review. Each recommendation
should be empirically informed – provide guides for actions that are properly based on past research and evidence. Where there are disagreements or missing evidence, and no clear-cut recommendations can be made, the review should say so.

Questions for Discussion

- What is the need and benefit of conducting a literature review?
- What sources should be included in the review?
- What questions should be kept in mind when analysing the literature?
- How does the literature review guide situation assessments?
Reading List


Case Studies


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:
- Explain the purpose of the literature review.
- Conduct literature review on a specific subject.
- Identify key arguments and evidence.
- Determine quality of arguments based on evidence, sampling, and generalisability.
- Draft literature review for programmatic action.

Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. Conduct literature search on topics selected in agreement with instructor, analyse findings, and produce 10-15 page draft to be presented in class.
2. Critically analyse a C4D programme to determine its strategic assumptions and discuss whether its actions are justified based on the literature.

Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
Formative research is conducted before programme development to understand the situation in order to develop a communication plan. Formative research provides insights into the issue the programme is trying to address from many perspectives, evidence to guide and justify strategic decisions, and specific recommendations. It is fundamental for improving the relevance, sustainability, and effectiveness of programmes.

Formative research comprises four tasks to understand the situation:
(i) Organise and summarise what is already known about the specific problem (e.g. low use of tuberculosis services, spike in the number of cases of malaria, increase in reported cases of gender-based violence)
(ii) Check assumptions by looking at existing research
(iii) Review relevant SBCC theories for concepts that can inform and/or guide research.
(iv) Identify gaps and plan and conduct formative research, if needed

A common misunderstanding is that for any new programme there is need to produce/conduct original field research to produce action-oriented guidelines. Formative research should not be narrowly identified with conducting original research in communities. It is broader than this as it refers to summarising existing knowledge from various sources in ways that help guide strategic decisions.

The formative research should offer a nuanced view of the problem grounded on different perspectives and sources of information, including affected individuals, community members, and decision-makers.

A problem tree is a useful tool for analysing a situation. The problem tree is one way to document:
- What affected communities believe/know about a problem
- What experts in the problem and the community/region think they know about the situation
- What evidence needs to be collected to complete the analysis (what we still don’t know that needs to be known”)

Using a problem tree encourages practitioners to take a deeper look at causes, along with a broader view of possible effects and ways to address the problem or situation most effectively. The trunk of the tree is used to state the core problem. The roots and branches exhibit the basic or underlying causes of the problem, and the top of the tree states the effects of the problem.

The trunk and the top of the tree often correspond to the levels of analysis in the socio-ecological model looking at individual, interpersonal, community/organisational, and the enabling environment. Crosscutting factors, noted in the branches of the problem tree, serve as the bridge between the different levels. These include:
- Direct causes - knowledge, motivation, and skills
- Indirect causes - access to materials and services
- Underlying causes - perceived norms and actual social norms, socio-economic factors, policies

The formative research should provide a complete picture that, among other issues, provides responses to questions such as:
- Who are the people most affected by development issues?
- What are the causes of the problem?
- How do affected people define the problem?
- What do experts know about causes and solutions to the problem?
- What has been in that locality/region to address the problem?
- How/whether/why people communicate about the problem?
- What institutional, human, and funding resources exist to address the problem?
- Who has direct influence/control over the problem?

Once the situation is fully understood, it is possible to decide how to:
- Focus a programme effectively on different groups of people—those affected and those influencing the situation
- Address the problem identified and its context through complementary SBCC strategies—advocacy, social mobilisation, and/or behaviour
- Change communication
- Work with partners, allies, and/or gatekeepers

Below is an example of how insights gathered during Step 1 can influence SBCC programme design.
Sample of Situation Analysis

The Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI)

Global situation
Since the launch of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in 1974, vaccination programmes have been one of the world’s most cost-effective public health strategies. These programmes reduce the burden of infectious disease globally and serve as a key building block for health systems in the developing world.

Country situation
EPI in country XXX was inaugurated on April 7, 1979. In 2006, more than 3.5 million children under 1 year of age were targeted for vaccination against the seven diseases covered under EPI. Although there have been tangible changes in the mortality and morbidity rates due to the intervention since 1979, national coverage has remained around 60% for the last few years. Accessibility to vaccination is almost universal, as evidenced by 95% coverage of BCG—the first vaccination after birth. Significant gaps remain, however, in achieving full vaccination at the right age and intervals.

According to data available from the Coverage Evaluation Survey (CES) 2000, while nationally 96% of the parents knew that children should be fully immunized by their first birthday, only 53% were translating the knowledge into action. Recent research (National EPI Survey, 2005) has indicated that although the awareness level of the importance of the vaccination is very high (96%), accurate knowledge regarding the number of doses, correct intervals, expected side effects, places where services are offered and right age for measles vaccination was found to be significantly low. Reports also show that a considerably high number of parents are aware of the importance of the vaccination and its schedules, yet they are reluctant to take their children to the vaccination sites at the right age and right interval, because they have their own traditional beliefs. In addition, outreach services are often unpredictable and health workers usually vaccinate without speaking to the guardian about the child’s next visit per the schedule.

This indicates that drop-outs (leaving the programme of their own choice) and left-outs (those who are not reached because of lack of adequate outreach) pose the greatest challenge.

As part of the Reaching Every District Approach (RED) promoted by WHO/UNICEF, the national EPI programme with UNICEF support has launched a special initiative focusing on the 15 lowest performing districts (those with completion rates below 60%). The purpose is to fine-tune solutions to the local problems impeding full coverage of all eligible children. Special micro-planning sessions at the district level have produced action plans for sub-district teams.
The situation analysis has described the broad areas of a development issue, and its underlying causes at the country level. This chapter in the strategy document should analyse the specific programme designed to respond to the problem and for which the communication strategy is being developed. The purpose is to find programme structures that can be adapted or strengthened for communication purposes and/or where communication can help the programme achieve some of its objectives.

Below are suggested areas to include, but this analysis should focus on issues relevant to social and behaviour change. These analyses are to help build the rationale for a communication strategy.

- Describe briefly what has been the national response to this problem up to present time
- Describe the contribution of government, UNICEF (and other UN agencies), donors, NGOs, other major initiatives and the private sector role. Include these programme achievements, constraints, lessons learned and challenges
- If the communication strategy is to cover a “phase-II” of an ongoing initiative, include a brief description of phase-I focusing on objectives, accomplishments and lessons learned
- Include a discussion of communication initiatives to date, including a list of all communication materials that have been produced so far how they have been used and how effective they have been
- Identify national goals and objectives and how this programme/project fits into the national plan and/or how it supports the MDGs, PRSP
- List goals and specific objectives of the programme and results expected, taken directly from the programme documents
- Identify stakeholders involved in the programme at various national, sub-national and community levels. Include frontline workers from government, NGOs, and CBOs who are significant participants in the programme. Describe their roles, skill levels, support/ supervision, constraints/strengths. Include community participation. To what extent has the community been involved in the programme? What roles and outcomes are expected from the community?
- Describe the extent to which existing service delivery is available and used (discuss access issues as well as quality of service)
- Description of service delivery agents can come here if not covered elsewhere (role, skill level, support/ supervision, constraints/ strengths)
- Resource mobilisation must be looked into to see if there are any new resources, partners, and channels being introduced in current programme? Any relevance to the programme’s ability to achieve its objectives?
- Review supply and delivery issues by taking into account facilities, hardware, equipment, materials (mention these only if they are a constraint to communication, participants’ behaviour change or if infrastructure building is a significant aspect of
the programme such as establishing and equipping drop-in centres for an HIV/AIDS programme where peer education and counselling is provided

- Describe the extent to which the programme addresses the social and behavioural factors described in the situation analysis. What are the gaps in the data?

Questions for Discussion

- What is the purpose of formative research?
- What are the possible information sources for formative research?
- What methods can be used for information-gathering?
- What questions should be answered with the information gathered?
- How is the research connected to programmatic recommendations?
Reading List

Mosquera, Mario. Formative Research Concept Note, typescript. New Delhi: UNICEF.


Case Studies


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Explain the goals and applicability of formative research
- Produce formative research plans
- Conduct formative research
- Analyse findings from formative research
- Identify strategic implications of formative research
- Identify the ethical dimensions of social science research
Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. Discuss the applicability of the socio-ecological model to the analysis of a given development challenge. Explore factors that affect the problems (namely, the range of social determinants) and ways that it could be addressed by taking a multilevel approach.

2. Present a case that used the SEM to produce situation assessment and strategies.

3. Discuss ways to decide/recommend actions based on SEM situation analysis. What are the points of entry into a given problem that is affected by multiple causes?

4. Conduct “mock” small-scale formative research in class.

5. Write critical review of formative research studies included in the module.

Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
- Case study discussion
Participatory Research

General Introduction

Participatory research is premised on the notion that people affected by a given issue are best positioned to understand challenges and solutions by being actively involved in the process of change. This approach is philosophically grounded on arguments that question whether powerful actors and technical experts are best-suited to produce nuanced understanding of situations that affect communities. Specifically, this approach is based on critical approaches interested in questioning dominant power structures and constructivist models that understand that human agency is fundamental for social change and that it requires people becoming actively involved. Also, it is rooted in a phenomenological approach that views people in terms of how they make sense of their surroundings and construct meaning about themselves and others.

Participatory research also draws from educational/pedagogical approaches that emphasise the merits of experiential learning to lead to successful, long-lasting knowledge that influences practices and a sense of ownership. Self-reflective inquiry is central to this process in ways that help people understand their conditions better and identify appropriate solutions and define outcomes. Community action is grounded on previous learning about people’s conditions. Such an approach leads to raising critical consciousness, as argued by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who pioneered this approach to encourage communities to understand structural reasons for oppression and opportunities for liberation. Beyond specific results, the main outcome of participatory research is the development of a sense of empowerment and control over situations and lives. Both, reflection and action are linked in Freire’s approach to education and knowledge. This basic principle underlies participatory research.

Participatory research is different from conventional methods in three ways. First, it is research designed to promote and facilitate action. It is not simply to gather information or produce knowledge for its own sake. Rather, it is intended to lead to specific actions that help communities as researchers to modify their environment. Second, it is sensitive to power relationships, for it aims to bring out voices of people in the
community and the overall processes that otherwise tend to get ignored. It is designed to erase strict boundaries between researchers and “researched” people by equipping everyone with critical tools and analytical skills. There is no clear-cut distinction between those who produce knowledge and those who are subjects of knowledge. By doing so, participatory research proposes a new model of knowledge that questions the classic model anchored on individuals and unequal power relations. Finally, participatory research foregrounds the idea of contextual knowledge, for it places the purpose/methods of knowledge within a specific context. It is about understanding a given context better and, in turn, incorporating the context in the act of knowledge.

Participatory research questions the purpose of research and knowledge, the relation between researchers and communities/public groups, the criteria used to determine effective data-gathering methodologies, the process of data analysis, and assessment of results and impact. By doing so, it challenges notions of technical dominance in terms of understanding and defining problems. It rejects the notion that knowledge is power over others that facilitate control. Instead, it inverts the terms of expertise/lay knowledge, and control/decision-making in the process of knowing by acting. Not only does it push communities to reflect critically about their lives, but also nudges researchers to think critically and seriously about their own approach to knowledge, result, and performance. Participatory research leads to a critical reflection on professional practice – a transformation in the way professional researchers think about their own work.

There is no question that participatory research has become widely used by a wide range of development and academic programmes in the past few decades, worldwide. Because it comprises multiple methods that can be adapted to contrasting circumstances, it is flexible and applicable to produce knowledge and action on agricultural, health, educational, environment and other issues. It has been used in both developed and developing countries, urban and rural settings.

One key innovation of participatory research is that it brings out new ways of thinking about evaluation. Because it opens up new dimensions and issues as a consequence of the research process itself, it cannot be simply evaluated in terms of changes in “technical” indicators (e.g. rates of immunization, nutrition knowledge, proper use of insecticide-treated nets) for this misses out the empowerment aspects. Consequently, innovative evaluation approaches and methodologies need to be used to capture the impact of participatory research. Assessing self-reported impact/change by communities is critical to measure outcomes.

Another important issue that participatory research brings up is that the outcomes are less predictable than in conventional research. One really does not know what would happen when people themselves produce knowledge, raise questions, and come up with possible courses of action. Neither results nor interventions can be
neatly predetermined. Here lies the richness of this approach: to provide guidelines that stimulate conversations and critical thinking whose ultimate results are not known ex ante.

A core idea of this approach is that the community is the unit of study/identity – whether a geographical area, people who shared similar interest/problems and sense of belonging. Also, it draws from local resources broadly defined to conduct research and improve lives. It is premised on the importance of partnership throughout the research process as many actors/individuals/institutions can act in different ways towards a common goal.

Questions for Discussion

- What is the purpose of participatory research?
- What are its philosophical premises?
- How is it different from conventional research?
- What innovations and challenges does it bring up?
Reading List


Optional Readings


Case Study

**Clacherty G and, J Kistner. 2001.** Evaluating the Zimiseleni researchers’ project: participatory research as intervention with "hard-to-reach" boys, PLA Notes.

Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Understand basic premises of participatory research.
- Critical thinking about the implications of participatory research.
- Assess strengths and limitations of participatory research.
- Develop guidelines for participatory research.

Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. Analyse a case study to determine contributions of participatory research and compare to conventional studies on the same subject.
2. Group discussion about the strengths and limitations of participatory research. Prepare responses to potential critiques and role play debate about the subject.
Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
- Case study discussion
Qualitative Methods

General Introduction

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that refers to a range of methodologies that are helpful to examine people's experiences and sense-making activities. More than a collection of specific methods, this kind of research gives the opportunity to understand issues from the perspective of specific groups of people, their interpretation and meaning on any given set of issues, practices, and objects. For example, if a project/study wants to understand how people live with a given illness, qualitative research allows to get a sense of their experience with disease, coping methods, expectations, sense of self and other dimensions of their lives. If a study wants to understand how parents make decisions about schooling, qualitative research offers a unique window into the decision-making process to assess how they view schooling, its importance vis-a-vis other priorities, expectations about children and so on. Qualitative research gives insights into people's lives in their natural settings. It examines how their socio-economic, cultural, and political context affects their views, thoughts, and feelings on specific matters.

Common methods include in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods, case studies, participant observation, and life histories. These methods require researchers to have an open and curious attitude as well as to exercise interpretative skills.

A key question is when to use qualitative research. Qualitative methods are useful when a project needs in-depth understanding of how people “live with” a given issue – how they see, interpret it. They give information about why people act in certain ways, particularly around complex issues, social/cultural norms, and beliefs/attitudes. They are also helpful to gather information about sensitive topics such as violence and personal relationships that they may feel uncomfortable responding in a survey or other methods. Obviously, this demands the right conditions and skilful moderator/interviewer to make people comfortable. When projects need to disentangle complex subjects and search for different nuances and details, qualitative research provides valuable approaches for
they aim to understand how issues are seen “from inside” people. Putting it differently, findings reveal insiders’ perspectives on a given issue.

An underlying premise of qualitative research is the social construction of the reality through people’s interaction with others, within specific contexts. The inter-subjectivity of social life – that is, how people develop ideas and interpretations – is a basic premise of qualitative research. This opens up to the existence of multiple perspectives on a given issue. The same issue or problem is constructed differently by people according to beliefs, knowledge, norms and other social factors. Another consideration that is important is whether people reflect upon their own beliefs and practices and, issues that can be captured through qualitative methods. Not only do researchers reflect upon the meaning of the findings, but also, if it is important to assess whether people exercise reflexivity on their practices and attitudes, and whether they do so alone or with others. This data offers insights about whether people think that an issue is important and with whom they discuss or develop ideas and interpretations.

Consequently, research questions need to reflect the kind of issues that can be approached through qualitative methodologies. If studying reproductive health issues, for example, a programme could understand couples’ perceptions about having children, how they make decisions, who influences decisions, how decisions are embedded in broad social-cultural and economic context, and perceived influences in decision about child rearing. These methods cannot answer, or are not the right way of getting information about number of children, effects of education on having children, and the like. Rather, they offer a way to understand the meaning of children within specific contexts – the value of children in their communities, social discourses/narratives about children, and so on.

To understand these issues, researchers could use in-depth interviews to identify perceptions and feelings, conduct focus groups discussions to assess opinions and community norms, and participant observation to get a sense of how people interact in certain social situations. Each method has advantages and disadvantages – some provide feedback from others and in-depth information, others do not; some are useful to gather data about sensitive, personal issues, and others are not. Understanding these differences is critical to use suitable methodologies.

It is also important to assess the limitations of qualitative research. Findings cannot be easily replicated, conclusions are hard to extrapolate to entire populations and inter-analysts reliability is more challenging than with quantitative methods.

In summary, qualitative research is critical to assess how people live and make sense of any given issue. It tells about “how” and “why” people think in certain ways, or make decisions, or what factors shape their views and practice. All these factors that need to be understood by getting a sense of how people explain/justify their attitudes and behaviours.
Questions for Discussion

- What is the purpose of qualitative research?
- What are its philosophical premises?
- What are its limitations?
- What questions can be answered through qualitative research?
- What methods exemplify qualitative research?
Reading List


Case Studies


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Understand basic premises of qualitative research.
- Critical thinking about the principles of participatory research.
- Assess strengths and limitations of participatory research.
- Develop qualitative research project.
- Design and conduct community resource mapping.
- Design and conduct in-depth interviews.
- Moderate focus group discussion.

Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. Select two scholarly articles that use qualitative research. Analyse them by considering the following questions.
   - Is the question suitable for qualitative research?
   - What methods are used?
   - Is there a distinction between people’s and researchers’ interpretations?
   - How does the method give researchers insights into people’s context?
   - What are the advantages of this type of research? What do we know that we would not know had quantitative methods been used?
2. Discuss the strengths and limitations of qualitative research to analyse a given social/development issue. What methods would be applicable?
3. Discuss how the case study illustrates the principles and strengths of qualitative research.
4. Draft possible questions that could be researched with qualitative methods, and others that cannot.
5. Draft a small-scale, qualitative research project and identify a research problem, questions, and suitable data-gathering methodologies.

Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
- Case study discussion
General Introduction

Quantitative research allows to measure phenomena by gathering information about a sample of the population. The purpose is to collect numeric data from respondents to offer a representation of the state of a problem. In C4D, this approach has been typically used to assess knowledge, attitudes and practices in a given population. The data is gathered through various methods including surveys, polls, and interviews. Through statistical analysis, researchers identify the prevalence and patterns about certain beliefs and knowledge.

Quantitative research is premised on the idea that analysis can be performed in a detached manner and that social phenomena can be documented numerically in ways that the data can help researchers draw conclusions about causality and significance. It features specific methods for data collection to understand causality and responses to certain stimuli, as in the case of experimental research. It widely uses sampling methods to collect representative groups on the premise that findings/results from that group can be extrapolated to the general population. Because it typically deals with large quantities of data, it uses computerised data analysis and specific statistical software. It is primarily of interest in findings related to large trends in a population that can be based in statistical tests to check for significance and validity of results.

Survey research is a widely used example of quantitative research. It is a method of data collection in which information is obtained directly from individuals, and provides the basis for making inferences about a larger population. Various methods can be used to collect information: mailed or self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face or telephonic interviews, and online surveys. It is conventionally agreed that surveys provide information about facts, perceptions, attitudes, opinions and reported behaviours. Survey demands going through distinct steps that include conceptualising the research problem (hypothesis, concepts, operationalise concepts); survey design (sample, procedures); instrumentation (draft questions, identify visual aids, format of instrument); plan survey management/administration; sampling according to goals and resources;
training interviewers; pretesting the instrument with a small sample to ensure clarity and suitability; surveying or actual use of the instrument; monitoring to ensure proper application; data coding; data processing; data analysis; and reporting findings.

Surveys can be used to gain information to formulate research questions and refine hypothesis, provide measurement of variables, and test causal hypothesis and rule out competing explanations. Instrumentation refers to the selection of the survey instrument – questionnaire, interview schedule to determine the content, form, wording, and order of questions. Questions can be open-ended or close-ended depending on the issue at stake and the interests of the researchers. Question wording is critical for it can lead respondents in certain directions or confuse them. Likewise, the order of the question is important. There are different kinds of questions relating to warm-up, demographic, substantive, preceded by the explanation of the purpose of the study.

In summary, survey research is the most efficient way to collect information about beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes among a large population. Different types of survey methodologies (from polls to intercept surveys) have strengths and limitations. It provides a considerable amount of data to determine baselines, plan actions and assess progress. Survey data gives a basic understanding about certain problems and it offers markers. Although there are low-cost techniques, survey methods can be costly, time consuming and labour intensive. Their use requires expertise in application and the participation, which demands trained people and careful pre and post planning and scheduling. They offer data that is understood among policy makers and donors for whom numerical data is the “golden standard” and mandatory to demonstrate rigour and impact. The limitations are that survey methods do not grasp the texture of specific contexts, people’s complex relation with various social/development issues, and a tendency to miss details required to understand how people “live” a given challenge/problem.

Aside from surveys, other quantitative methodologies commonly used in C4D include basic experimental designs, and pretest/post-test control group. Experimental methods are designed to test the effect/impact of certain stimuli (e.g. messages) on knowledge/attitudes. Participants are surveyed before and after experiments to identify possible variations that can be attributed to the intervention (stimuli). This methodology is useful to assess changes in ideational factors that may lead to behaviour/social change. Pre-test/post-test control group are used to determine whether differences before and after can be explained by a given programme. For example, a communication programme to promote primary education enrolment in one district is compared to another district where no programme was implemented. Differences between both districts at the beginning and the end of a specific time period can be analysed and may be attributed to the intervention.
Questions for Discussion

- What are the advantages and limitations of quantitative methods?
- What are the steps in the design and implementation of survey methods?
- What resources are needed to conduct survey method?
Reading List


Case Study


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Understand basic principles of quantitative research.
- Critical thinking about the uses of quantitative research.
- Assess strengths and limitations of quantitative research.
- Develop guidelines for quantitative research.
- Design and conduct small-scale survey research.
- Design and conduct interviews.

Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. In groups of two or three people, conduct a mini-survey among classmates about a given issue. In designing the survey, identify a causal relation between two phenomena (independent and dependent variables) in social development. Define a hypothesis that explains the relationship. Design a survey to assess whether that relationship holds by gathering information through questionnaires. Make sure the wording of the questions is correct. Students can use internet survey sites (such as survey monkey or surveygizmo) to collect responses.
2. Discuss a case study (or other article that features quantitative methods applied to understanding C4D issues) in terms of suitability of methods to analyse the research problem, gathering appropriate data, study design, methods used, and analysis/implications.

3. Conduct multivariate analysis of government data on a given development issue (e.g. maternal mortality). The purpose is to develop skills to interpret secondary data.

Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
- Case study discussion
Analysing and Reporting Data

General Introduction

Once data is collected through various methods, the next step is to analyse and interpret the findings. The purpose of this step can be to understand a situation/problem, as well as obstacles and opportunities, and to assess progress and challenges. The goal of the analysis varies according to the objectives of any given programme as well as the specific stage in programme design and implementation.

In line with participatory principles, it is necessary that data analysis and reporting be conducted in collaboration with key participants and stakeholders to promote ownership and participation, foster diversity of perspectives on the significance of the findings, improve rigour, and maximise the use of findings. A strong analysis should reflect various views that exist/converge in a given programme. The data does not lead to specific results – it all depends on the interpretation, interests and views that participants bring into the analysis. Sensitivity to questions of power in a programme – that is, who has authority to provide assessments and interpretations of the findings as well as who determines who/when to participate – is important to fully integrate various perspectives. Programmes need to understand the value of collective, multi-perspective analysis and find mechanisms and specific moments for this exercise. This is what “systems thinking” means in this context – bringing together various interests and perspectives around a common problem to produce analysis and recommendations that reflect collective thinking (not just a single set of priorities).

This approach is also necessary to avoid false dichotomies between quantitative or qualitative methodologies. There is no reason not to think that well-grounded, sophisticated analysis demands considering a variety of data and perspectives. A mixed-method approach that foregrounds stakeholders’ participation and is pragmatically oriented to identifying courses of action is needed.
Collective analysis can be guided and formalised through various techniques. One option is to use the Theory of Change which refers to critical thinking exercises to produce a comprehensive picture of expected changes, sequences and ultimate objectives. This is valuable to flesh out assumptions about why/how change will happen. Too often the logical sequence, embedded in theoretical models of behaviour/social change, is not fully discussed or even known among participants. Theory of Change forces participants to have clear, honest, and realistic expectations. Steps include identifying long-term goals, determining preconditions needed to achieve the goals, linking interventions to results, identifying indicators of results, and producing a short narrative to summarise chain of changes.

Also, “problem tree” analysis is helpful to systematise data, produce analysis, and move forward with planning. It helps to understand causes and consequence of problems and identify solutions. It allows participants to break down a problem in different parts, identify facts and factors, assess causal connections, identify key groups/populations, provide a diagnosis of needs/data, and develop credible solutions. The fact “problem tree” analysis requires conversation/participation from stakeholders, contributes to building a shared sense of understanding, action and objectives. It is a team-building exercise as well as a roadmap for action.

Certainly, it is important to remember that several ”analytical frameworks” (e.g. the logical frame”) commonly used in C4D and international/human development assume that all events/data can be neatly analysed and boxed in a model. Here, it is important to remember that the model should not narrow the analysis or be the priority; instead, what is needed is to use models/approaches that help to streamline the analysis in ways that stakeholders understand the underlying model of change. Simple models are often unable to capture the dynamics nature of social change; yet it is important to agree upon a parsimonious model that serves as guidance and common point of reference for all parties involved.

Data reporting needs to be open and effective in ways that stimulate further discussion and feedback. It is not simply about what “data suggest” but rather, about how findings can be analysed to define priorities and progress, and keep stakeholders informed and involved in the process. Recent studies show the importance of having innovative practices to report data and analysis. Old-fashioned written reports and “experts’ meetings” may be insufficient and do not tap on new opportunities opened up by the availability of digital technologies. Updates through social media, digital storytelling (short videos, interviews), discussions/feedback promoted by email messages, community dialogue, and other methods can be used to generate ideas and responses. Just like in other steps of the strategy, it is important to keep doors open to solicit/encourage community dialogue and feedback.
Questions for Discussion

- What is the purpose of data analysis and reporting?
- What methods can be used to guide the process of analysis?
- What principles should be central to data analysis?
- How can data analysis be conducted in innovative and participatory ways?
Reading List


Optional Readings


Case Study


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Understand basic premises of data analysis and reporting.
- Critical thinking about models of data analysis.
- Develop guidelines for data analysis.
- Conduct data processing and analysis.
- Identify different perspectives in data analysis.

Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. Conduct “tree analysis” and/or “theory of change” analysis of a given dataset to identify potential perspectives around a given issues, competing/similar analysis, ways to facilitate collective critical thinking.

2. Conduct role play in which different students in class are part of different stakeholders around a given problem. Each sub-group needs to present their position on the problem at stake and the group as a whole needs to produce a common analysis and identify ways to report the results.
Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
- Case study discussion

Questions for “Problem Tree” Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is happening? What is the problem?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the causes of a problem?</td>
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<td>Who is directly and indirectly affected by the problem?</td>
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<td>Who and what is influencing the situation?</td>
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<td>Who can do what to address the situation?</td>
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<td>Who has done what to address the problem?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
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<td>Necessary Changes</td>
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<td>Actions</td>
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Evaluation and Research

General Introduction

Much has been researched and discussed about adequate frameworks and models to evaluate C4D programmes. Recent thinking has been that evaluation demands the involvement of communities and dialogue from the beginning of the process/programme, the identification of agreed-upon objectives and outcomes by all stakeholders, and the definition of the purpose of evaluation and research. It is necessary to go beyond the mind-set that evaluation is expensive, that it is done at the end of the process as a stand-alone step, that it is conducted by “experts”, and that there are only a few suitable methods to gather data. Instead, it is necessary to integrate evaluation as a process that is central throughout the process, that capitalises on the expertise of all actors involved in a process, and that is fundamental for learning and achieving goals. Evaluation/research methodologies need to be inclusive and participatory.

Evaluation can be conducted for several reasons such as assessing/demonstrating impact, providing feedback information to fine-tune activities or shift directions, learning collaboratively about the process and outcomes, strengthening capacity and collaboration, aiding effecting decision-making, or documenting activities and performance for public dissemination.

Decisions also need to be sensitive to specific needs. While some participants may need quick data to assess impact, others may have a different timeline. While some may require quantitative data, others do not. Ultimately, it is incumbent upon stakeholders to decide expectations about information they need to know, why they need it, and how they will use it. Ideally, there should be a combination of different kinds of evaluation – some that are intrinsic to the programme that allows participants to learn and move forward, and other reasons related to the specific institutional expectations by various partners.

Clarifying these points is necessary to steer the discussion towards specific objectives and data-gathering methods. Evaluation data can be different and may be used for
different purposes. Not all stakeholders have similar interests and expectations in terms of necessary evaluation data. Sensitivity to these interests as well as efforts to reach consensus are important from the beginning. Participants need to identify common questions and then determine the mix of appropriate methodologies and types of data to be collected.

Certainly, these decisions are contingent on available resources and support. Certain approaches may be too costly or involve too many human resources. This is why it is important to find creative ways of incorporating evaluation/research in many ways along the process/programme, and tap into the resources/strengths and the skills of participating actors.

Therefore, evaluation needs to start with a clear idea about why it is necessary and how the results will be put to use. Clear research questions are critical to identify the data that participants need and produce satisfactory answers. Data can be used for several purposes – what matters is what answers to what questions stakeholders believe are important. Any of the methods reviewed in this module can be used. So, it is not about methods, which are ways to collect certain data, but rather about questions and answers that are needed.

As previously discussed, various methods have strengths and limitations. A methodological mix may be suitable if this fits the interests and expectations of the parties involved. However, it is important to caution that a mixed strategy may be confusing and render equivocal results. Discussions about the contributions and problems of various methods are important to determine the right approach and avoid duplication. Participants need to discuss whether specific research approaches would provide the kind of information that they need in order to answer important questions. Also, the selection and application of methodologies needs to be embedded in participatory ideas. Too often, stakeholders meet and discuss suitable strategies, but they are not fully involved in the evaluation/research process. Thus, methodologies need to involve participants in various ways – data collection, analysis, presentation, report and so on.

Another important condition is that evaluation/research needs to follow a flexible design, open to including data and ideas along the process. Questions may emerge that were not considered at the beginning. Outcomes/impact that were not anticipated may come out during the implementation phase that need to be captured, analysed and documented. Given that participation is central to the overall programme, rigid evaluation approaches aren’t suitable. Participation means that unexpected developments, priorities, and lessons emerge at any time. Therefore, it is necessary to be prepared to assess the significance of expected trends/outcomes that result from people’s interaction and actions. This is why realistic and flexible timelines and plans are needed to be able to make adjustments and address issues that may be deemed important.
Any evaluation plan should have a clear list of indicators that are realistic, relatively small in number, and are linked to participants’ expectations. They should also provide room for changes if interesting developments emerge that were not originally identified as “expected outcomes”. This is why adopting an open attitude about what transpires during the process is critical to bring it up as part of the evaluation process. Data should consider important variables and socio-demographic factors (e.g. gender, age, education, caste, income) to be able to provide solid explanations for change (and lack of).

Finally, evaluation is an opportunity for participants to learn critically and discuss why change happened or didn’t happen. As a process of collective reflexivity, it is about drawing lessons to understand specific processes and consider in the future.

Questions for Discussion

- What is the purpose of evaluation and research?
- What principles should guide research design?
- Why is it necessary to change conventional approaches to evaluation?
Reading List


Case Study


Learning Activities

The learning activities should be aimed at developing the following competencies:

- Understand basic premises of evaluation research.
- Critical thinking about the uses and goals of evaluation research.
- Assess strengths and limitations of different approaches to evaluation research.
- Develop guidelines for evaluation research.

Lectures, Small Group Discussions and Presentations

1. Groups will develop a hypothetical case of a project and various stakeholders to identify possible goals for various participants and indicators as well as ways to reach consensus on common goals and uses of evaluation research. Presentations to class and discussion.

2. Role play of meeting in which various stakeholders discuss institutional needs and expectations and try to agree on common research outcomes and indicators.

3. Critical review of case study to understand common evaluation goals/indicators, flexibility to incorporate new goals, data collection methods, and use of evaluation data in project assessment.

Unit Assessment/Evaluation Methods

- In-class exercises
- Assignments
- Case study discussion