Conducting an Interview

Successful interviewing is an art and should not be treated as a mechanical process. Each interview is a new source of information, so make it interesting and pleasant. The art of interviewing develops with practice but there are certain basic principles that are followed by every successful interviewer. In this section you will find a number of general guidelines on how to build rapport with a respondent and conduct a successful interview.

# A. Building Rapport with the Respondent

The supervisor will assign an interviewer to make the first contact with each of the households selected for the survey. Any capable adult member of the household is a suitable respondent for the household interview.

As an interviewer, your first responsibility is to establish a good rapport with a respondent. At the beginning of an interview, you and the respondent are strangers to each other. The respondent’s first impression of you will influence their willingness to cooperate with the survey. Be sure that your manner is friendly as you introduce yourself. Before you start to work in an area, your supervisor will have informed the local leaders, who will in turn inform the households selected in the area that you will be coming to interview them. You will also be given an identification badge that states that you are working with the [implementing partner].

## 1. Make a good first impression

When you arrive at the selected dwelling first ascertain if there is one or more than one households that lives in the dwelling. If there is more than one, you need to do a household interview for each. Do your best to make the respondent feel at ease. With a few well-chosen words, you can put the respondent in the right frame of mind for the interview. Open the interview with a smile and greeting such as “good afternoon” and then proceed with your introduction. A short chat on the respondent concerns can help to establish rapport; however, you have to caution not to spend most of you time discussing the respondent concerns.

## 2. Obtain respondent(s) consent to be interviewed

You must obtain a respondent’s informed consent for participation in the survey before you begin an interview. Special statements are included at the beginning of the questionnaire. The statements explain the purpose of the survey. They assure a respondent that participation in the survey is completely voluntary and that it is their right to refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any point. Be sure to read the informed consent statement exactly as it is written even if the local language before asking a respondent to participate interview.

## 3. Always have a positive approach

Never adopt an apologetic manner, and do not use words such as “Are you too busy?” Such questions invite refusal before you start. Rather, tell the respondent, “I would like to ask you a few questions” or “I would like to talk with you for a few moments.”

## 4. Confidentiality of responses when necessary

If the respondent is hesitant about responding to the interview or asks what the data will be used for, explain that the information you collect will remain confidential, no individual names will be used for any purpose, and all information will be grouped together to write a report.

Also, you should never mention other interviews or show completed questionnaires to the supervisor or field editor in front of a respondent or any other person.

## 5. Answer any questions from the respondent frankly

Before agreeing to be interviewed, the respondent may ask you some questions about the survey or how he or she was selected to be interviewed. Be direct and pleasant when you answer.

The respondent may also be concerned about the length of the interview. If they ask, tell the respondents that the interview usually takes about 30 minutes. Indicate your willingness to return at another time if it is inconvenient for the respondent to answer questions then.

Respondents may ask questions or want to talk further about the topics you bring up during the interview, e.g., about specific the net distribution campaign. It is important not to interrupt the flow of the interview so tell them that you will be happy to answer their questions or to talk further after the interview.

## 6. Interview the respondent alone

The presence of a third person during an interview can prevent you from getting frank, honest answers from a respondent. It is, therefore, very important that the individual interview be conducted privately and that all questions be answered by the respondent.

If other people are present, explain to the respondent that some of the questions are private and ask to interview the person in the best place for talking alone. Sometimes asking for privacy will make others more curious, so they will want to listen; you will have to be creative. Establishing privacy from the beginning will allow the respondent to be more attentive to your questions.

If it is impossible to get privacy, you may have to carry out the interview with the other people present. However, in such circumstances, it is important that you remember that:

• If there is more than one eligible respondent in the household, you must not interview one in the presence of the other

• You must omit certain questions which you are instructed in the questionnaire to ask only if you have total privacy

In all cases where other individuals are present, try to separate yourself and the respondent from the others as much as possible.

# B. Tips for Conducting the Interview

## 1. Be neutral throughout the interview

Most people are polite and will tend to give answers that they think you want to hear. It is therefore very important that you remain absolutely neutral as you ask the questions. Never, either by the expression on your face or by the tone of your voice, allow the respondent to think that she has given the “right” or “wrong” answer to the question. Never appear to approve or disapprove of any of the respondent’s replies.

The questions are all carefully worded to be neutral. They do not suggest that one answer is more likely or preferable to another answer. If you fail to read the complete question, you may destroy that neutrality.

If the respondent gives an ambiguous answer, try to probe in a neutral way, asking questions such as the following:

“Can you explain a little more?”

“I did not quite hear you; could you please tell me again?”

“There is no hurry. Take a moment to think about it.”

## 2. Never suggest answers to the respondent

If a respondent’s answer is not relevant to a question, do not prompt her by saying something like “***I suppose you mean that. . . Is that right*?**” In many cases, she will agree with your interpretation of her answer, even when that is not what she meant. Rather, you should probe in such a manner that the respondent herself comes up with the relevant answer. You should never read out the list of coded answers to the respondent, even if she has trouble answering.

## 3. Do not change the wording or sequence of questions

The wording of the questions and their sequence in the questionnaire must be maintained. If the respondent has not understood the question, you should repeat the question slowly and clearly. If there is still a problem, you may reword the question, being careful not to alter the meaning of the original question. Provide only the minimum information required to get an appropriate response.

## 4. Handle hesitant respondents tactfully

There will be situations where the respondents simply say, “I don’t know,” give an irrelevant answer, act very bored or detached, or contradict something they have already said. In these cases, you must try to re interest them in the conversation. For example, if you sense that they are shy or afraid, try to remove their shyness or fear before asking the next question. Spend a few moments talking about things unrelated to the interview (for example, their town or village, the weather, their daily activities, etc., but careful not to be carry over).

If the respondent is giving irrelevant or elaborate answers, do not stop them abruptly or rudely, but listen to what they have to say. Then try to steer them gently back to the original question. A good atmosphere must be maintained throughout the interview. The best atmosphere for an interview is one in which the respondent sees the interviewer as a friendly, sympathetic, and responsive person who does not intimidate them and to whom they can say anything without feeling shy or embarrassed. As indicated earlier, a major problem in gaining the respondent’s confidence may be one of privacy. This problem can be prevented if you are able to obtain a private area in which to conduct the interview.

If the respondent is reluctant or unwilling to answer a question, explain once again that the same question is being asked of women all over the area and that the answers will all be merged together. If the respondent is still reluctant, simply write REFUSED next to the question and proceed as if nothing had happened. Remember, the respondent cannot be forced to give an answer.

## 5. Do not form expectations

You must not form expectations of the ability and knowledge of the respondent.

## 6. Do not hurry the interview

Ask the questions slowly to ensure the respondent understands what is being asked. After you have asked a question, pause and give the respondent time to think. If the respondent feels hurried or is not allowed to formulate their own opinion, they may respond with “I don’t know” or give an inaccurate answer. If you feel the respondent is answering without thinking just to speed up the interview, say to the respondent, “There is no hurry. Your opinion is very important, so consider your answers carefully.”

# C. Language of the Interview

The questionnaire for the survey is in English except the introductory consent section (local language). One of the first things you will do when you approach a household to do an interview is to establish the languages that you will use. If the respondent is fluent in English, then conduct the interview in English. If not the interview will be conducted in the language the respondent is fluent in, but make sure you don’t wrongly interpret the questions when translating it in the respondent language.

However, in some cases, it will not be possible for you to find a language which both you and the respondent speak. In this case, try to find out if the respondent speaks a language which another member of your team or the team supervisor speaks. If so, tell your supervisor so that he or she can arrange for that person to conduct the interview.

If at all possible, try to avoid using interpreters since this not only jeopardizes the quality of the interview but also will mean that the interview will take more time to conduct. However, if the respondent does not speak a language which any of your team members speak, you will need to rely on a third person to translate for you. Since the interview involves some sensitive topics, it is best if you can find another woman to act as an interpreter if you are conducting the woman’s interview. You should not use the respondent's husband as an interpreter under any circumstances. Children are also unsuitable interpreters.