PANOS

- Giving Voice -

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING ORAL TESTIMONY PROJECTS

Panos Oral Testimony Programme
Panos Institute, London

Preface

Using the manual

Giving Voice aims to provide practical guidelines for implementing an oral testimony project. It should also serve the purpose of a training manual. Most of the manual has been written for the "coordinator" or "project manager" of a potential oral testimony exercise, who may also organise or facilitate a training and planning workshop for interviewers. Throughout the text there are pages which have been designed to be photocopied and used as handouts for participants during such a workshop – key points, checklists etc. These are indicated with a tick ✓ in the right-hand top corner.

You may not feel it appropriate to use all of these suggested handouts or you may feel that other sections of the manual will be equally useful. Feel free to use this manual in whatever way works best for you and your project – and let us know what you think.

The manual was written in English, and is available in Spanish and French, but it is expected that a planning and training workshop will be carried out mostly in the language with which participants feel most comfortable. It may therefore be helpful to translate some of the handouts and other key sections, prior to any workshop.

Feedback

Panos has found that no oral testimony project is exactly the same, and we learn something new every time. We would like to revise the manual periodically, in order to take account of your experience, as well as of our own continuing work in this field. We also intend to incorporate any suggestions you have for improving the contents and format of these guidelines. Thus we welcome feedback from people and projects using the manual.

Please send any comments and suggestions to:

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If you require any further information about the Panos Oral Testimony Programme or would like to receive any of our publications please contact us at the address above. If you would like to find out more about Panos in general, you can visit the web site at www.panos.org.uk . To view our online archive of oral testimonies from mountain communities visit www.mountainvoices.org

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Chapter 1: Introduction

- **What does Panos mean by oral testimony?**
- **Oral testimony and development**

The purpose of this manual is to provide simple and practical guidelines to help with the implementation of oral testimony projects. It has been written in response to requests for such guidelines, from groups and individuals already convinced of the value of the approach in their work, but lacking detailed explanations about how to implement such a project. If you wish to examine the ideas behind adopting this methodology, a detailed exploration of the potential uses and value of oral testimony collection and dissemination in the development process is to be found in Panos' *Listening for a Change: oral testimony and development*, by Paul Thompson and Hugo Slim[1].

What does Panos mean by oral testimony?

While "testimony" can have legal or other meanings, when Panos and its partners refer to oral testimonies, they mean the result of free-ranging, open-ended interviews around a series of topics, drawing on direct personal memory and experience. Interviewers do not use formal questionnaires, and narrators are encouraged to reflect upon the events they describe, and to give their views and opinions.

The narratives which result are subjective, anecdotal, selective, partial and individual. But what some might call "flaws" in the evidence are in fact strengths, for the *way* that people remember or describe something tells us what is important about it to them. Oral testimonies offer clues as to how people interpret events and - especially valuable in the context of development - what their priorities and values are. Ultimately, they tell us less about the fine detail of events and experience than about their *meaning* for people. So do not start an oral testimony project if you want only to uncover facts, figures and irrefutable truths; do embark on one if you want to gain greater understanding of what people *believe* to be important and true, and why.

No short cuts

Panos has been taking oral history methodology and adapting it to working in the development context for some eight years, and this manual is one way of passing on some of the lessons learnt. We intend to update the text at intervals, and would like to

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[1] A limited number of free copies of this are available to CBOs and other non-profit organisations, primarily in the South.

hear from you with any comments or additions you might have. Panos' experience has highlighted one irrefutable point: testimony collection projects are fascinating and rewarding, but demand a lot of time and hard work. It takes practice to get good at interviewing; transcription is laborious and time-consuming; and reading and working with all the texts in detail demands real commitment. If those involved, and especially the coordinator, are not prepared for the patience, organisation and persistence required, the enterprise will fall short of its aims. Panos has certainly discovered that, however successful a training workshop may be, the degree to which the potential is fulfilled depends enormously on the energy and skill - and personal commitment - of the individuals involved. There is no "quick fix" to gathering good testimonies.

This is not a guide to the collection of oral history or oral artistry (by which is meant songs, poems, traditional stories etc), although much of what is said will apply to such activities. It is a guide to *adapting* such research and documentation methods to grassroots development work. Indeed, the manual is aimed particularly at the kind of partners Panos has been working with over the last decade - small, locally-based groups, often operating with the minimum of resources and financial assistance. One key value of oral testimony in development is that it can amplify the voices of those whose economic, social and/or educational position has excluded them from the circles of influence and power. Many so-called "ordinary people" rarely have the opportunity to speak out and contribute to development decisions and change, yet often have much to offer based on first-hand experience of living and working in marginal environments.

So a fundamental aim of this kind of activity is to amplify the words of those who are too often ignored or spoken for. Yet in addition, becoming an interviewer has been for many participants as novel and valuable an experience as being a narrator. While many of the interviewers have had a university education, by no means all did. Often a conscious choice has been made to include people in the interview training whose access to education has been limited, and who would not normally have the chance to become involved in this kind of collaborative research or information gathering.

With this in mind, you should be clear from the planning stage about your own objectives, and the extent to which you are interested in the *process* of collection as well as the *product*. In other words, is the sole focus of your project the stories which result? Or are you also interested in the way the information/testimonies are generated, and in the increased skills and confidence that can confer on all those involved - interviewers as well as narrators and other members of the participating community (for more information on **Capacity building** see Chapter 2, p15)?

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Oral testimony and development

Oral testimony …

- shows the **complexity** of individual experience - people's lives are not sectorally divided, there are frequently no neat divisions between the different aspects of their lives, and there may be contradictions and conflict, as well as connections

- brings home the **reality** of everyday life - the spaces in between significant events which constitute the majority of people's lives

- reveals generally **hidden spheres of experience** (for example, family life), and **hidden connections** (between, say, social relationships and economic decisions, past experience and future priorities). In the development context in particular, it can shed useful light on links, and gaps, between policymaking and implementation

- as a collection builds up, it reveals the **range** and **variety** of people's experience

- it can reveal **common** or **shared experiences**, not necessarily anticipated, that give weight to undeclared community needs and agendas

- reveals the **hidden voices**, those who are usually spoken for by other people, and/or marginalised by gender, age, education, ethnic identity etc

- deepens **understanding of the past**, and so helps people develop a balance between continuity and change, traditions and modernity

- takes a **dynamic, longitudinal** view, rather than the more traditional donor "evaluation of current activity"

- is **more democratic** than some information gathering, in that it places emphasis on the knowledge and experience of the narrator, not the interviewer

- **the listener gains** in understanding and sensitivity to views and values which s/he may not share or from which s/he may have become distanced

- open-ended techniques allow **the unexpected** and unforeseen to emerge

Oral testimony and development

Panos' experience

Panos has been working in this field since 1991, training small teams in oral testimony methodology. The interviews are done in local languages, in relaxed settings, between people who share some, but not necessarily all aspects of each other's background. The emphasis is on openness and willingness to learn: and so there is a basic assumption that the process of listening, as well as narrating, is of benefit. For example, when the interviewer is a development worker, taking the time to listen can significantly increase their understanding and respect for perceptions and values which they may not share. A group of fieldworkers in Southwest China who took part in a project endorsed this: "In the process [of testimony collection], we realised that the village women are much more capable than we previously thought," admitted one project worker, "and our understanding of practical issues is better ... more realistic."

Panos' Oral Testimony Programme was developed in the context of the Institute's mission to stimulate debate on global environment and development issues. Panos does this by generating and distributing information, raising awareness of different arguments and perspectives, and communicating the concerns of the marginalised sectors of society. Thus a key aim of the kind of oral testimony project with which Panos has been involved is to generate "information for development", not least by increasing opportunities for people to speak out in their own words on issues which concern them, rather than having their views defined or interpreted by others.

We have to date worked with some 30 partners in more than 20 countries and languages. These partner groups have ranged from environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to women's groups, from rural media organisations to social development NGOs, from cultural documentation centres to university departments, and from local offices of international organisations to community-based groups with a purely local remit. Sometimes the groups we have worked with have come together specially for the project, and a local coordinator has created a team of interviewers representing several different interests or organisations - educational, development, cultural, academic, environmental etc.

Four examples of Panos projects and partners

- The Kenyan Oral Literature Association with Interlink Rural Information Service collect testimonies in Mount Elgon on local perceptions of change and development in the area, and priorities for the future.

- Instituto para el Desarollo de la Pesca y la Mineria, a social action group in Peru, work with four communities in the central Andes, focusing particularly on the social and economic impact of large-scale mining activity and the accompanying environmental pollution.

- Oxfam Hong Kong in China with the Yunnan Minority Gender and Development Group, and the Women's Studies Centre, Tianjin Normal University, gather testimonies from ethnic minority women in mountainous regions in the south west and Han women in the north east, seeking their views on and experiences of the rapid changes their communities now face.

- The Highlands Church Action Group and members of the Department of History, National University of Lesotho, work with displaced farming communities, recording their experience of forced resettlement, and their efforts to rebuild their lives and communities.

Although we have been involved in some one-off projects, most of the time Panos and its partners were working on one of three broad themes: "women and conflict", "mountain/highland communities" and "resettlement". The aim of the women and conflict project was to enable women to articulate their own experiences, perceptions and concerns about the impact of armed conflict and its aftermath. It was partly designed in response to an acknowledged gap in the research being used - and undertaken - by development organisations on the impacts of war. In particular, development agencies recognised that the perspective of women was a vital, yet generally missing ingredient.

By collecting the stories of some 250 women in 12 countries, a picture built up which showed how partial is the predominant image of women as generally passive, grieving victims. Despite the harrowing nature of many experiences, the cumulative impression was of strength and resourcefulness, and of women being active agents of change and survival. The wide diversity of experience and response to conflict also came through strongly, as did the reality of war and the longer term impacts, probably more forcefully than any reporting or academic research could convey. The experience of war is not the bombs and explosions, as Marie (from Lebanon) said, "War is what happens afterwards, the years of suffering hopelessly with a disabled husband and no money, or struggling to rebuild when all your property has been destroyed." Reality, complexity and variety of experience - all these facets were highlighted in the testimonies, and the stories of women's strategies and reactions provided a valuable complement to the body of existing

research. (For more on some of the outcomes of this project, see Chapter 2, p11 and Chapter 8.) The project and its publications, in the words of one reviewer, gave "women a voice on a subject which has for too long been dominated by the macho language of war itself and those who report it."[2]

The Resettlement project with which Panos is currently involved is concerned with development-induced displacement, which has often affected the least powerful and least vocal. Resettlement as a result of dams and other large-scale infrastructure shows little sign of slowing down, and increasing numbers are being not only economically disadvantaged by the process, but also socially and culturally impoverished. The aim of this oral testimony project is to communicate the experiences of those most directly affected, and to gain greater understanding of the complex impacts of resettlement, particularly the less visible or quantifiable. (Please get in touch with Panos for more information on this and other projects.)

Strengths and limitations

Panos' partners chose to implement oral testimony projects because they felt both the process and the product would have a particular value in their circumstances. The women and conflict project, for example, illustrates several characteristics associated with oral testimony collection:

- it revealed a previously little-examined perspective on an important development issue
- it highlighted the diversity and multiplicity of views and responses women had
- it produced powerful and realistic evidence of less visible, less immediate impacts of conflict
- for most of those involved (as interviewers and narrators), it represented a valuable (and for many unique) opportunity to convey their stories to a wider audience

The box on page 3 sums up these and other reasons for undertaking oral testimony projects, most of which have been identified by our partners and other groups over the years.

If you want to know more about the different uses people have made of oral testimony in development, you could refer to *Listening for a Change,* which has some detailed examples. Some were primarily research projects, where oral testimony was part of identifying, planning and/or evaluating development (but the emphasis on "listening" was

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[2] Frances D'Souza, Article 19 (International Centre Against Censorship), reviewing Panos' 1995 book based on the testimonies: *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: women speak out about conflict.*

itself educative for the interviewers); others had a clearer focus on empowerment. This approach can be particularly fruitful where people are going through rapid social change, perhaps as a result of formal displacement (whether because of conflict or planned development). But uncomfortably fast rates of change can also be a by-product of modernisation and/or globalisation, which within one generation can render traditional occupations and ways of life "unviable". One of the values of oral testimony collection is that it allows such groups to document and record their memories and understanding of the past, and reflect upon its relation to the present. This can not only strengthen their articulation of their priorities and concerns for the future, but it can also help different age groups learn from and understand each other - something which can become increasingly difficult as the education and experience of new generations begins to differ markedly from those of their parents and grandparents. Such work may also pinpoint areas of disappearing knowledge and traditional practice, which would merit more detailed research and documentation.

So - oral testimony collection does not replace more formal, quantitative research, but it complements and illuminates it. It cannot give a complete or fully "representative" account of a community's views or experience (unless you were to undertake a project on a massive scale), but it is illustrative, vivid, often challenging, and breathes life into more precise statistics. It can be empowering, but it is important to be realistic about the potentially exploitative relationship between interviewer and narrator (see ***Interview relationships***, Chapter 2, p21 for more on this). It *is* subjective, and may feature unverifiable facts and prejudice - but these can be strengths rather than limitations, for recognising what people *believe* to be true is crucial to understanding their values and priorities. Panos' oral testimony projects are based on the view that **perceptions** are just as important as facts, and oral testimony collection provides a way to gain understanding of those perceptions and their influence on people's thinking. A good oral testimony records not just events and practices, but provides clues as to the **meaning** and **significance** of them (see the section on ***Questions to elicit meaning***, Chapter 4, p44). Participants in oral testimony projects should gain **insight,** not just information.

Memory

While the focus of your project may not be pure history, some consideration of the role memory plays is worth taking into account when interviewing. People remember what they consider to be important (this may not be what the interviewer considers important). Memories are organised, selective and reconstructed. We regularly re-evaluate and redefine our past decisions and actions in light of where we are *now.* We retain or rework memories to help us to make sense of the present, and we may repress painful and difficult memories. We mix together "public" and "private" memories, each influencing the other. Sometimes they cannot be reconciled, and one of the values of focusing on marginalised groups can be to give space to memories which have been suppressed by the "public" dominant version of events.

Our memories are influenced by age (as people get older there is a tendency to reflect on and review one's life); by gender, social position and cultural background; by our life experiences and changes in social values and attitudes; by other people and by the interviewer. Try to distinguish whether narrators are relating first-hand experience or telling you what they have heard (from others, through the media, repeating popular myth). Is there any bias shaping what they are saying and is that important in the context of your project?

Research has shown that we tend to remember places, events, activities, daily routines, people, feelings, sounds, smells and images better than dates, lists, statistics and other more factual information. However, where oral traditions are strong, people may prove to have extremely accurate memories for genealogical and chronological information, for example. Whatever the situation, don't get frustrated if narrators get dates or statistics wrong. These are simple things to put right. Recognise memory for the valuable resource it is; it tells you how people interpret their life and the world around them.

Chapter 2: Developing the Project

- **Planning your project**
- **The role of the project coordinator(s)**
- **Selecting interviewers**
- **Selecting narrators**
- **Planning the fieldwork**
- **Ethical issues**
- **Interview relationships**

Planning your project

In the early stages of developing your project it is useful to consider the following: aims and objectives, practicalities, and outputs and activities.

Aims and objectives

(a) Is the intention primarily to record a particular perspective, which has been missing from a debate/discussion? [An example might be truant school children (former and current) talking about why drop-out rates are high, to balance research done among teachers/educationalists]

(b) Is it to record aspects of social/cultural/economic/environmental change or activity which are insufficiently documented? [In this case the level of detail to be gathered may be greater than with (a)]

(c) If the project is NGO-led, do you have evidence that communities[3] involved have an interest in the project, and in using the testimonies which result?

(d) Is the primary purpose to document certain experiences or events for the narrators and their community/ies?

(e) Is the intention to communicate the testimonies to a much wider audience as well - national or perhaps even international? [In this case there may be a need to ensure as comprehensive a range of perspectives as possible, more so than with (d).]

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[3] A word about the use of the term "community" in this manual: we recognise that it implies some kind of homogenous, clearly defined unit, yet the likelihood is that the people with whom you are working in fact represent many interests and identities, some of which may be in conflict. It is one of those terms or generalisations which are shorthand for something more complex, only useful as long as its limitations are recognised. One of the characteristics of oral testimony is that it is "individual", and that it highlights the variety of experience and response contained within any group of people - so there is basic assumption in this manual that a good oral testimony project should aim to explore and reflect the complexity and diversity within any "community". (See also *Selecting narrators*, p 18)

Practicalities

- ***Time frame:*** some of our partners, fitting in the oral testimony collection with other work, have taken 18 months from initial planning, to fieldwork, and finally production of, say, a booklet of testimonies. Some have needed longer. A few have completed projects in shorter time frames. Just as an emphasis on quality not quantity of interviews is vital in these projects, so it is better to take more time, reflect upon and adjust the collection if necessary, rather than rushing at speed. Be realistic and if in doubt, allow for more rather than less time. More specific information on how long to allow for certain elements can be found elsewhere in the manual (p19 and Chapter 7).

- ***Budgets:*** you'll need to consider the costs of equipment (recorders, tapes, batteries, stationary); any travel expenses and per diems; fees for the interviewers (unless this is voluntary, or subsumed in their ordinary work); fees for coordinator and any advisors; fees for translations if necessary, and for transcription if that isn't being done by the interviewers; fees or presents for narrators (the need for this differed from project to project, and usually took the form of a gift in kind (soap, sugar) and copies of resulting tapes, booklets etc - see p26); and the cost of any planned outputs or activities based on the testimonies.

Outputs and activities

You also need to think about the uses that the participating community and/or organisation wish to make of the testimonies, in case they have implications for the way that you work. Remember, too, that narrators should have as much information as possible about the project and the ways in which their stories may be communicated. Broadly speaking, these could be for advocacy, education, documentation, and/or communication. Here are some examples:

- using the interviews or extracts thereof, in written or taped versions, in community discussion groups
- using the interviews or extracts thereof to raise public awareness of a particular situation/experience
- using people's first-hand experience as evidence to lobby for better or different policies
- recording changing and/or disappearing working or social practices
- documenting community history and/or indigenous knowledge
- developing community-authored literacy materials

To achieve these, a project might do all or any of the following:

- publish a community booklet(s)
- set up an exhibition
- make, or contribute to, a radio programme
- establish a small archive or contribute to an existing museum/documentation centre
- organise meetings of involved parties (including policymakers) to discuss the findings
- put on a drama based on the testimonies

If you want to make radio programmes using some of the material, you may wish to use broadcast quality recorders. However, there are other factors to consider here - see the section on *Equipment* (Chapter 4, p40). If you want to produce an illustrated booklet or set up an exhibition, you might want to get pictures of the narrators as the interviews are gathered. Simple head and shoulders portraits can be very effective. Again, always make sure that the narrators are happy to be featured in such plans (see Chapter 8 for more information on testimony-based activities and outputs).

Examples of activities based on oral testimony projects

Northern Uganda: testimonies are gathered by and from local women on their experience of war and its aftermath. Interviews feature in national paper over several weeks, generating greater national awareness of women's experiences, concerns and actions. Local language booklet launched with meeting, and participants interviewed on local radio. Interviewers and narrators form their own community-based NGO and use the methodology to interview men and young people. The testimonies generate wider, more informed discussion within the community of the impact of the violence, its effect on gender relations, and the links with economic and social loss resulting from conflict.

Central Andes, Peru: testimonies gathered in highland communities whose traditional agricultural and social organisation has been dramatically affected by large-scale mining activity in the region. An exhibition is set up using extracts from the testimonies and the general public invited to view it and contribute their own memories, pictures, paintings and views on their changed social and physical landscape, as well as suggestions for ways to improve the polluted environment. As a result, a new coalition of individuals and groups (embracing pensioners, schoolchildren, unions, women's groups and *campesino* communities) is formed, who agree to work together to articulate their concerns and press for change. A booklet is produced based on the testimonies, and a video is made from additional interviews. At roundtable meetings with mining and local authority officials, these provide compelling and powerful evidence of the impact of the mining industry.

Finally, even at the planning stage, thought needs to be given to how you are going to monitor and evaluate the project (see Chapter 9). It is worth building this in right at the beginning of your project as it will contribute to the efficient management and coordination of the project as a whole.

Here is an example of one project's aims and objectives. The overall aim is to increase understanding and awareness of the impacts of resettlement by listening to the views and experiences of those who have experienced it first-hand. The focus is on individuals and communities who are relocated as a result of development projects (in this case by a multi-million dollar water supply project in Southern Africa) and to explore less visible and more long-term affects, especially social and cultural.

Project Aims
The overall aims of the project are:

- To increase understanding and awareness of the impacts of resettlement

- To contribute towards improving resettlement policy and practice

- To provide an outlet for the voices of more marginalised communities and individuals whose views and experiences are key to greater understanding of the process and effects of displacement

- To establish widespread understanding of the value of oral testimony collection as a means of accessing the views and experiences of individuals and communities experiencing resettlement

Project Objectives
The immediate objectives of the project are:

- To train a team of interviewers in oral testimony collection

- To interview villagers prior to, and at one and two yearly intervals after relocation

- Where appropriate, to assist the displaced in their adaptation to new circumstances, by providing opportunities to reflect on their experience and articulate concerns and priorities

- To produce an illustrated community booklet based on the testimonies, primarily for the villagers themselves

- To produce and disseminate a second booklet and/or other information outputs (in local/national language(s)) based on the testimonies, accompanied by background information and appropriate analysis, to serve as a stimulus to discussion and debate among those involved in the process of resettlement

- To use testimony collection (process and product) to encourage dialogue between those displaced and the NGOs, implementing agencies and government parties involved

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The role of the project coordinator(s)

Having established your aims and objectives, now is the time to clarify who will be involved and what their roles will be, if this hasn't already evolved. It is best to appoint one person with the overall role of coordination and implementation. They may or may not also be an interviewer/narrator.   Essential qualities are organisational ability, enthusiasm and genuine commitment to the project, good local contacts, and good communication skills. Previous relevant experience is ideal, but not essential.

The effectiveness of the coordinator can be crucial to the project's progress, yet over-reliance on one person can also be dangerous. Oral testimony projects may run for several years, and if it is "championed" largely by one person, if and when they change jobs, it can be difficult to ensure continuity of effort and quality. Panos has more than once experienced this, to its cost. Ideally, there should be a broad commitment to the project within the institution or community concerned, and the coordinator should ensure that others are well-briefed enough to take on his/her role should they leave.

Indeed, although for the purposes of brevity we refer to the "coordinator" throughout this manual, it is likely that some of the tasks outlined below are best shared by several people within the community/organisation, perhaps making a distinction between administrative roles and other more strategic responsibilities. It is, however, essential that one person is responsible for ensuring everything is done, including on-going monitoring, and that the momentum is kept up.

Broadly speaking, the role of the coordinator(s) will be:
- To do some initial research into the subject of the project, and find out what other organisations have already done work in this area. This may help identify (a) themes and topics to be explored and (b) individuals/ organisations that can advise on these, and comment on/review the final results
- To plan and organise the training workshop, if you are having one
- Supervise selection of interviewers
- Draw up the provisional budget and timetable for the work
- Handle distribution of equipment, expenses etc
- After the workshop, finalise the selection of potential narrators, and ensure the interviewing sessions go as planned
- Provide support to interviewers as necessary. (Depending on the experience of the interviewers, this may mean double-checking the quality of their early interviews in the field)

- Monitor progress of collection. Check that the interviewing team are keeping up with their allotted number of testimonies and if not, why not
- Ideally halfway through, have a mid-way review meeting. Assess whether any changes to the interviewing schedule/selection are necessary in order to correct any imbalance or gaps in the material collected so far. See what lessons have been learnt and make any necessary adjustments (see Chapter 6)
- Supervise transcription
- Review all completed interviews, annotate for local/cultural references, and supply or research any necessary background information (see Chapter 5)
- If necessary/feasible, arrange for the review of interviews (with any specific queries) by any local organisation/researchers/specialists
- If appropriate, organise translation
- If working in partnership with another organisation such as Panos, ensure transcripts and notes are sent to the partner, and that any feedback from them is passed on to the project participants
- Supervise the publication, broadcast or other follow-up activities using the testimonies
- Coordination of overall monitoring and evaluation

Selecting interviewers

Interviewers should be people you know (or be recommended by someone you know), whom you can trust to take the initiative in following up interesting points, and to be sensitive in handling difficult subjects. Above all, they must be good listeners. If you feel able to leave the conduct of the interviews as much as possible to them, they will feel more sense of purpose and ownership.

As a general but not hard fast rule, interviewers should be of the same sex as the narrator. There are a number of topics which people feel more relaxed talking about man to man, woman to woman. At times, though, interesting material may emerge from taking the opposite approach. The important thing is to make such a decision with the narrator's concerns uppermost, and never to force them into an uncomfortable situation. (For more on *gender*, see p21.)

Think about the number of interviewers that you can realistically train, manage and support. In Panos' experience, up to 10 interviewers works well; it can be difficult to give adequate attention to individuals when there are more than 15 interviewers.

If you are holding a workshop, and most of the workshop participants are young, do include some older members of the communities in (a) session(s). They will be able to contribute to your topic list and involving this group will help generate a greater sense of community involvement in the project and also increase inter-generational understanding.

The interviewers themselves must be interested in the subject of the research and must have a good understanding of it. This is usually through personal experience, so that they can see the significance of what is being said, respond to it, and find their own questions to ask in order to elicit further information. Probably most important is that the interviewers have a good *social* understanding of the situation; more technical knowledge may not need to be that detailed. It is worth giving this aspect some thought, however. If the aim is to document, for example, traditional agricultural or health practices, then specialist knowledge of these areas will be necessary, if the interviewer isn't to appear foolishly ill-informed and probably fail in the task. Similarly, if the local political or historical background is complex and important to the interview, you risk losing much time and irritating the narrator if you need to keep asking them to explain or clarify references and events. Panos' partners have usually adopted a more generalist approach, sometimes getting a specialist reading of the resulting testimonies and thus pinpointing areas meriting more detailed, technical research.

The interviewers should speak the language of the narrator, and preferably - if there is a difference - the national or other language from which translation will not be a problem. Ideally, they will be from, or live and/or work in, the area/community.

Capacity building

As stated earlier, you will need to consider the extent to which you are interested in the process of oral testimony collection - and its empowering potential - as much as the product. If you want to use professional researchers/interviewers, you may well get a higher *percentage* of "successful" interviews, in which the majority of subjects are covered, and interesting topics skilfully pursued and teased out. But if you train members of your organisation and community to become interviewers, then you will have enriched the skills and experience of people who might otherwise never have done this work. And if things go as they should, they will also have gained in sensitivity and understanding of different perspectives and experiences, through the process of listening. In some instances, they will be narrators as well, which may make them better interviewers.

Some of these untested interviewers may prove to be ill-suited to the task, and you will experience the frustration of listening to/reading interviews where good leads are ignored, or in which the interviewer focuses on his/her own interests and doesn't allow the narrator to develop their own story and perspective. But when this "capacity-building" process works, and the people involved really identify with the narrators, the project and its purpose, and if you are prepared for a certain variability in quality - then the results are worth the extra effort. There is a greater sense of ownership by those involved, and more likelihood that the material will be used by the communities concerned in ways which are valuable to them. In a number of cases, participants have gone on to start new testimony projects, or expand upon the original activities (see Chapter 8 for examples). Perhaps the ideal combination (but this has not always been possible for Panos), is to have a few experienced researchers/interviewers and for the rest of the team to be specially trained local, interested, committed individuals.

Insiders and outsiders

People who are closely associated with the narrators sometimes fail to ask certain questions. This may be because the answers seem obvious to them, or because they have made assumptions about behaviour or beliefs which may be commonly accepted - but not *necessarily* by the individual to whom they are listening. Some feel that an outsider can more easily ask for a detailed description of a local practice or event without it seeming artificial. A group of ethnic minority women in Southwest China, who interviewed rural women for a project which Panos ran with the Yunnan Minority Gender and Development Group and with Oxfam Hong Kong, discussed the pros and cons of "insider" versus "outsider" at length. They concluded that insiders (in this case, interviewers from the ethnic minority group and area) were, on balance, best. They had the advantage of a deep understanding of the local environment, which it was much harder for an outsider to develop unless they had a very long preparation time. The training can help insiders to avoid certain pitfalls, such as assuming they know the answers or failing to ask the apparently obvious. (For more on preparation, see Chapters 4 and 5.)

The most successful interviewers have generally proved to be those with some degree of tertiary level education: they can grasp the topic and the significance of the information gathered, and can transcribe interviews quickly. For example, project workers can make good interviewers. But this is not a hard and fast rule. Anyone with experience of, or a clear aptitude for, listening to/interviewing people should be considered - **good communication skills are vital.** Some project workers, for example, feel themselves distanced from, and in some ways superior to, less educated members

of their community. They would not make good interviewers. The more sensitive and receptive researchers are to other points of view and perceptions, the better. Personal skills can be as, if not more important than professional experience.

Enthusiasm is very important, since interviewing is quite arduous, it may involve travel and may require patience to deal with frustrating delays and difficult conditions. Recent graduates are more likely to have the ideal combination of education and enthusiasm than more experienced professional people. Some who regard themselves as seasoned interviewers, such as journalists, may fail to grasp the different approach involved in oral testimony collection. To some of them, interviewing means getting what you want to know out of someone and then moving on. They may lack patience and the willingness to listen with openness, to learn the unexpected or the uncomfortable, to unravel or accept the confusing or the contradictory.

Make sure the interviewers realise that they will have to transcribe the interviews they conduct. This is a time-consuming task, but is best done by the interviewers themselves, not least because they are most able to remember the context and resolve any bits of the tape which may seem unclear. Panos has occasionally trained interviewers who were good listeners, committed to the project's aims and keen to be involved, but whose level of literacy was low. This meant others had to take on their transcription. This is a possible - but not ideal - way of working.

Local knowledge
The more sensitised your interviewing team are to the local situation/conditions, the more they will understand the facts and significance of what narrators say, and be aware when something has been left *unsaid*. They are more likely to judge successfully whether gaps or silences are because something seemed too obvious to state; or because the question was inappropriate; or because the conversation has touched on areas the narrator prefers to forget, consciously or unconsciously. "No comment" does not necessarily imply no opinion.

Familiarity with the local situation includes being aware of and respecting customary modes of speech and communication. Certain kinds of narrative, for example, may only be told at particular times, or seasons, or by certain individuals.

The right words
Part of sensitisation of the interviewers relates to matters of translation. Sometimes a situation has arisen where the mother tongue in which the interviews are being

conducted may be suitable for ordinary family concerns and locally specific cultural and historical matters, but the interviewers use a national language (or sometimes English) to express other concepts. Thus thought and practice may be necessary to grasp the best ways to explain the purpose of the project and to describe certain topics in the language of the interview. Are there, for example, equivalents of words such as *gender relations, perception, value, priority* or even *development*? "Testimony", for example, can itself have negative connotations, as in Cambodia where it revived the horrors of forced trials and confessions. And in Nepal, our partners had a long discussion around the word "perception". There was no exact equivalent, so it took time before the interviewers felt happy with the chosen ways of expressing it.

It's important that discussion around translation begins *before* interview collection. In a training workshop in China, for example, there was concern about the word initially used to translate from English the topic of "gender". The first word used (translated literally the equivalent might be "women's power/rights + ism") was viewed as rather militant and, it was felt, might well invite suspicion or defensiveness. The other, favoured term (more akin to "femininity + ism") was seen as a "softer", more academic term. One way of describing the difference is that between "feminism" and "women's studies". "Information" was another potentially loaded word, with one version sounding more like "spying" or surveillance than the other. Understanding and respecting these nuances, and getting them right can be crucial to establishing an atmosphere of trust and common purpose.

Selecting narrators

Unless you are deliberately focusing on a particular sector, narrators should come from a range of ages, occupations, social backgrounds, and experiences. Most of them should be "ordinary" people who can speak about their own experiences, perceptions and concerns. But it can be useful to include people who are organisers or who represent organisations, such as women's groups or community organisations. These informants will be able to talk more broadly about a community's situation and needs, the changes which may have taken place and how people are trying to address these. This kind of interview is particularly important if part of the audience for your project comprises NGOs and development workers, who will be interested in interventions that are being made, and people's views of these.

Where changing social, environmental and economic customs or conditions are the focus of a study, it will be important to include those who perform some of a community's traditional functions, for example, local healer/ herbalist, religious leader etc.

Selecting individuals you know through your work or local contacts has two potential advantages: they may already have a degree of confidence in your organisation/area of activity and therefore in your interviewer, and so rapport will be easier to build up; and you have more chance of being able to select people who you know can talk fluently, have interesting things to say, and may positively enjoy being interviewed. It is important, however, not to neglect those people who appear to be less "easy" to interview, but whose experiences and perspectives you suspect to be particularly illuminating.

Any oral testimony project should make a special effort to embrace a wide range of opinion and experience, and deliberately seek to include those who within "the community" may be overlooked, spoken for or even excluded (see footnote at the beginning of this chapter, p9). Otherwise you run the risk of reinforcing hierarchies, collective myths and dominant viewpoints within your narrator group/project audience.

Group Interviews

Most interviews will be with individuals, but the occasional group interview can be valuable: being in a group sometimes gives a speaker confidence or generates a more lively and original discussion. It is also useful to hear a consensus view of particular experiences or issues. Groups may set their own agenda for discussion, raising topics of most interest to them as a group - this can be a valuable insight in itself. Such sessions can also highlight discrepancies between individual and collective views of the same event/experience. Group dynamics may mean that less assured participants are not able to get across their version of events.

In some societies the group is the familiar forum for discussion. People may be willing to be interviewed individually, but only after there has been some collective debate and agreement over this approach.

Planning the fieldwork

You may have had an idea from the beginning, of the number of interviews you plan to collect. Most of Panos' partners worked for a set period of time and gathered between 35 and 50, with each interviewer gathering on average about seven each, sometimes more. Since some of the interviews will inevitably be less successful or interesting than others, you may want to collect slightly more than the agreed amount. Obviously, if a project is to run over a long time, you could collect any number of interviews, or you could plan to keep adding to the collection at different stages.

One thing to consider is that most people get better at interviewing with practice, because their confidence grows and therefore their ability to relax and empathise. So it is better to give a few people a reasonable number to do, rather than a lot of people a few each.

Allow for an average of two interviews per day for each interviewer - it is exhausting work, and needs alertness and enthusiasm. Interviews are likely to last between 45 minutes and two hours, but introductions, rapport building, finding a suitable location etc will add to the time needed. If a narrator still has a lot to say after two hours, a second interview should be arranged. More than two hours at a time is usually too long and tiring for both interviewer and narrator.

Three days' consecutive interviewing is probably as much as one interviewer can do at a time without losing concentration or enthusiasm. Some of Panos' interview teams were fieldworkers who carried on their normal activities, and gathered their interviews over quite a few months, every now and then fitting in an interview. This can work well, as long as the momentum doesn't die, but it can mean a dilution of concentration and thought, so that the interviewer fails to pick up on common or conflicting threads or interesting connections between individual accounts. Probably the best results are obtained when the interviewer can devote a block of time to the interviews, rather than having to fit them in around other work.

Ethical issues

There are a number of ethical issues to consider, some of which are to do with the relationship between interviewer and narrator and the potential power imbalance. Others are more related to how one deals with certain interview situations. As far as the latter point is concerned, we have included a few *Scenarios for discussion* in Chapter 3, p35 which participants could discuss (at the training workshop if you hold one).

Although in an open-ended interview the narrator has much more control over content and direction than when responding to a formal questionnaire, the role of the interviewer is by no means neutral. Their questions, the leads they choose to pursue or leave, all these influence the final shape of the narrative. In addition, in many oral testimony projects with a stated aim of amplifying the voices of the marginalised, interviewers are likely to be more educated than the majority of the narrators, and ultimately, through their involvement in the project, to have more control over the way the testimonies are used and communicated. Some community-based projects are more cooperative and equal than others, but however correct the intentions, it is better to remain honest about the

difficulties of achieving completely equal power over process, content and outcome, and to guard against any potential exploitation of the situation.

When arranging interviews, remember that both interviewer and narrator bring their own personal histories and elements of subjectivity to the process. Interviewers should be sensitive to the consequences that the conversation, and its later use, might have on that person's life. This is especially so if the interviewer is not from the area of testimony collection; they are free to leave, while the narrator remains *in situ*.

Interview relationships

The following are some of the points to be considered in any discussion of interview relationships.

1. Gender: In most cultures there are distinctions between men and women's roles that influence everyday life. Remember, too, that men and women may have different ways of communicating. Women are sometimes not accustomed to speaking freely or having their opinion sought, whereas it is often culturally more acceptable for men to set aside time and space for talk and discussion. Women may not have been encouraged to reflect critically on their lives and situation, and so may respond rather briefly to questions initially, and patience and support will be needed to draw them out.

It is also important to think about gender when choosing themes to discuss. Some issues might be considered too private to be told to somebody of the opposite sex, for example, reproductive health, illness and sexuality. Same sex interviewing might be essential in such circumstances, and is generally preferable whatever the topic. It will be necessary in regions where a man and a woman cannot be left alone without jeopardising the women's reputation. If a man must interview a woman or vice versa, it is important to be aware of local conventions. An "outsider" may be forgiven for some transgression, their mistake being put down to ignorance. But it should not be assumed that such forgiveness is "automatic" or that it will not have ramifications for the narrator. A further consideration comes from restrictions to women's mobility due to cultural or religious rules, or simply family and household responsibilities (see also *Location*, Chapter 5, p 51).

2. Identity: Ideally, most interviewers will be of the same background as the narrators, whether ethnic, religious, racial and/or cultural, but translators or future readers of the interviews will not necessarily be so. Thus it may still be important to elicit clear descriptions and definitions of local customs, culture and/or common practice. But

sometimes interviewers will not share the narrators' background or identity, in which case bear in mind any historical power relationships between the two groups which may affect the interview. Equally important is that such interviewers research and respect local custom and history (see **Local knowledge**, p17). For example, simply being aware of the conventions or styles of conversing within a particular society will help you understand their way of relating to you in an interview. Some interviewers – who may have moved away or spent years elsewhere for education, training and/or employment – found they had lost touch with their "roots" and needed to re-familiarise themselves with certain conventions, practices or events.

3. Social class/caste: This can affect the interview, particularly when there is a difference in levels of literacy and education. Sensitivity to this is essential; narrators may not want to reveal too much of themselves if they feel socially disadvantaged with respect to the interviewer, especially if they feel judged in their own homes. In the development context, interviewers who are identified with a local project or agency need to be aware that narrators may be tempted to give them the answers they think the fieldworkers want.

4. Age: Consider whether having young people interviewing old people will affect the interview, particularly in societies with strong views on respect for elders and the passing on of knowledge. And while an older person might have more time to speak and much to say, and may greatly appreciate a good listener, make sure you don't overtire him/her. Respect is essential.

In the section on **Attitudes**, Chapter 5, p50, the importance of respecting the narrator is emphasised. An example of how one interviewer failed badly in this sense, was a man who got increasingly irritated at an elderly farmer's inability to give his exact age, precise dates for events, or measurements of fields, yields etc. But such concepts were of little value to the subsistence farmer - he had his own, more qualitative, ways of measuring time and area which should have been respected. The narrator clearly became uncomfortable and lost confidence as the interviewer kept adding up the years and correcting him. Eventually, the interviewer gave up. The narrator recovered and had many interesting things to say. The interviewer's persistence over accuracy was unnecessary, unproductive and might have left the narrator feeling inadequate.

By contrast, an interviewer in Peru was careful to give his elderly narrator the respectful title "Don", and took care to ask for personal details in a non-obtrusive or judgemental

way. Instead of simply asking if he was literate (as some interviewers did) he enquired: "Tell me, Don Ignacio, did you have the opportunity to go to school?"

Informed Consent

Narrators should never be made to feel uncomfortable or anxious as a result of the interview process or the way their words are subsequently used. So it is crucial that they are completely clear about the objectives of the project, the potential use of their material and that any requests for anonymity, or for withdrawal of material, are respected. Conventional academic research projects sometimes obtain a "condition of use" agreement, read and signed by the narrator. Others request a clear assignment of copyright by the narrator, which allows the researcher to use the material without further consultation, having of course made it clear what form those uses are likely to take. However, copyright laws - whatever the country - are always complicated and in relation to oral history, rarely clear-cut. An example of a "condition of use" form is included on page 25.

The activities undertaken by Panos and its partners are not conventional research projects. While the principles of good practice should always be adhered to, the method of doing so may vary and needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Projects such as those with which Panos is involved are essentially generated by a desire to make certain people's voices heard more loudly and/or widely. Thus the projects stem from the basic premise that the narrators' words will be communicated to others. Usually, there will be end products produced for and by the community, which is not necessarily the case with a project generated by the need of an outside researcher to increase his/her own knowledge (however useful that knowledge is to wider academic or policymaking institutions).

Moreover, many of the communities where testimonies have been collected by Panos' partners are isolated and have relatively poor access to education or the media. In such circumstances, signing a "condition of use" agreement could not, in all honesty, be claimed "informed" consent, if the signee (a) can't read the document and (b) has no real experience of the concepts therein described. In addition copyright laws, and attitudes to enforcement of any rights, vary from country to country. In these circumstances, pieces of paper which narrators may hardly be able to enforce are of less practical value than a clear and publicly acknowledged commitment on the part of the project participants to use the testimonies only for the purposes explained and to respect anonymity, use of pseudonyms, proper acknowledgements etc. And in projects where

participants include members of the community, both as interviewers and narrators, there is naturally a strong vested interest in honouring any such promises.

Similarly, in oral history projects narrators are often asked to read, and if necessary amend, the transcript of their interview. In many of Panos' projects, levels of literacy meant this was not practicable. But the important thing is to give thought to and find out how, if at all, the narrators want their interview returned (on tape perhaps), or whether they prefer to have a copy of any resulting end-product. You might also consider asking for and recording the narrator's verbal consent to the use of their story, at the beginning of the interview.

Ultimately, coordinators will need to judge the most appropriate approach on all these aspects for their project, but experience to date indicates that most narrators have taken part because they positively welcomed this all too rare opportunity to relate their own experiences of, and views on, broad development and environment issues, and to participate in a project which specifically aims to convey those views beyond their own physical and social world.

This is an example of a "condition of use" form. If it is appropriate for your organisation to use such an agreement, this should provide you with some ideas for creating your own.

CONDITION OF USE FORM

(One copy for *** organisation, one for narrator)

NARRATOR'S NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

_____

_____

PHONE NUMBER _____

1. **I agree that the tapes of the interview(s) given by me on the following**

   date(s) _____

_____

should be made available by *** organisation to members and researchers

(delete as appropriate)

2. **I agree that ***organisation may publish or cause or allow to be published**

   all or part of the interview transcripts.

3. **I wish the following restrictions to be placed on the use of the tapes and**

   transcripts (if no restrictions write 'none')

   _____

_____

   _____

NARRATOR'S SIGNITURE _____

DATE _____

✓

Key points

- Power is tipped in favour of the interviewer so do not exploit this in the interview or afterwards when using the material.

- Be clear in your explanation of the project, where the tapes will end up and how they will be used.

- Honour any commitments you make. Do not imply that you can help narrators (for example in their development needs) or promise more than you can fulfil in order to gain their cooperation or to thank them for their interview.

- Although it is not usual to pay narrators for their contribution, it may be appropriate to take a gift, especially if they are taking valuable time away from work to talk to you. Consider what is culturally acceptable. Whatever you decide, be consistent: bad feeling can be created if some people are treated differently.

- Be aware of how your narrator talks about other members of the community, particularly more powerful ones. Don't encourage too many negative remarks about specific people if they could be considered slanderous. If you are intending to make the tapes and/or transcripts public, this could cause problems for the narrator (and the project).

Chapter 3: Running a Workshop

- **Workshop sessions**
- **Sample timetable**

Some users of this manual may not be considering a training workshop, because they are using already experienced interviewers. However, the other purpose of a workshop is to ensure that all project participants are involved in the development and design of the interview collection and related activities.

The following outline (and the **Sample timetable** on p39) simply provide a basis on which you could construct a workshop to meet the particular needs of your own project. Before establishing the time and place of the workshop, you must have given thought to the selection of your interviewing team (see **Selecting interviewers**, Chapter 2, p14), and to the inclusion of any relevant outside participants, for example, local specialists in culture etc. While Panos has found the format described below to work well, it is just an example of how things *might* work, not a blueprint. If you already had a topic list and needed less time discussing the issues, you could run a training workshop in perhaps three days.

Aims of a workshop

Prior to the fieldwork, Panos and its partners usually run a 5-day workshop. The primary purpose of this is:

- to discuss the aims and objectives of the project
- to discuss the subject being explored and develop a framework of questions
- to train the interviewers (or provide opportunities to practice and review testimonies for those with previous experience)
- to finalise the project plans

Who participates?

1. The local coordinator/project leader(s) and any other relevant members of the organisation(s) responsible for the project
2. The interviewing team
3. A "trainer"/facilitator with experience of oral testimony collection - this could be the project leader or coordinator (using this manual), or someone from outside
4. Any people with specialist knowledge of the locality/society/topic which is the main focus of the collection
5. Representatives of the community of narrators, if not already (or sufficiently) represented by people in (1), (2) or (4)

Workshop sessions

Try to make the workshop as interactive as possible. Once the interviewers have done their practice interviews (usually Day 3), their involvement and participation in workshop discussions usually needs no prompting, but in the first couple of days you may need to consciously encourage them to give their own views.

Day 1

Session 1. Develop shared understanding of aims and nature of the project

- After the introductions, the coordinator should explain the project to ensure that all the interviewers understand what the intentions are, and can raise any queries they may have. You should discuss oral testimony and how this kind of open-ended interviewing complements other forms of information gathering and research.

Session 2.   Discuss the topics to be explored; develop a framework for the interviews

- In the afternoon, you could have an open discussion about the topics to be explored, to ensure that interviewers have sufficient background knowledge of the issue. This should also be the session in which the interviewers and any community representatives contribute their local and personal knowledge and experience, to help refine which issues are most likely to be of concern in this particular collection exercise. Draw up a list of the topics as they are raised. It is important that this session is not too structured and that people feel able to suggest any issues and ideas they have. Use a flip chart or big sheets of paper and stick them up around the room as the papers fill up with ideas.

Day 2

Session 2. (continued) Discuss the topics to be explored; develop a framework for the interviews

- It can be a good idea to bring in another contributor at this stage, perhaps a specialist in a relevant issue such as gender, environment, refugee studies, oral literature. It could be someone active in local history, culture, environment, politics - whoever might enhance understanding or background knowledge for those involved in your own project. By stimulating further discussion, it can encourage interviewers to take a broader approach to the subject, and increase their awareness of different nuances and links they may wish to explore. As said earlier (***Selecting interviewers***, Chapter 2, p14), the degree of specialist knowledge of your interviewing team will vary, and so

part of the role of these contributors may be to read the testimonies later and draw out the significance of, for example, the botanical information.

- This is also a good time to give some more thought to the groups of people to be interviewed - to ensure you cover the range of knowledge and experience you hope to gather through the testimony collection. Depending on the focus of the project, it might be helpful to construct a time-line together, listing significant events and changes in the communities concerned.

- Go back to the list of topics and start to organise them under themes, and continue to modify it and/or add topics, in the light of interviewers' comments. The end result is a topic list. This is not a list of questions, but an organised grouping of the themes and issues which the interviewers will want to explore. (See pp30-31 for an example.)

- Ideally, interviewers should have a good sense of the topic list once they are carrying out an actual interview. Initially, however, they may prefer to have some topics or ideas jotted down so that they can remind themselves if need be. Gradually they will become more familiar with the range of issues, and build up confidence about their ability to sustain questioning, and to let the conversation flow.

On the next two pages is an example of a list of topics, which was developed by participants in a workshop in Lesotho. The testimony collection was the first part of a project looking at the effects of resettlement on mountain communities in Lesotho. The topic list was the result of everyone brainstorming and contributing their ideas for the topics which seemed important to explore in order to build up a picture of the villagers' current life (soon to be changed by relocation), and their experience of the resettlement negotiations.

This is only an example; your own project will generate a completely different set of headings and topics.

Lesotho Oral Testimony Collection: Topics for Interviews

This is not an exhaustive list; other topics might come up during your interviews. You should not attempt to ask about all these topics in one interview. Always ask for personal examples and stories when talking about these topics.

Family
Family history: parents; husband/wife
Number of children - where are they and what are they doing?
Number of brothers and sisters - where are they?

Contact outside village
Reasons for travelling to other villages and towns - now and in the past
If experienced town life - what was it like?
What do you think of people and life in the lowlands?

Family and social life
Health services - modern and traditional, use of herbal medicines
Diseases - have they changed, have perceptions of them changed?
Friendships: roles of men and women; relationship between generations; role of elders
Marriage - any changes; weddings; relations between husband and wives
Churches - their role

Food and drink
Has diet changed? Impact of alcohol

Schooling and traditional education
History of access to schooling
What effects does schooling have on individuals? on the community?
What kind of education is needed for mountain communities?
Have there been important people in your life, who taught you things of value?

Cultural activities
Children's songs and stories
Songs; songs of history, praise songs, prayer songs, prayers and rituals to bring rain
Are there songs about resettlement?
Dancing, music, women's dances for special occasions
Feasts, celebrations, funerals
Activities when not working
Initiation for boys and girls - differences with the past - what does it mean to become a man/woman now?

The mountains
Stories about where they live and about the mountains
Being a herdboy - memories of; any herding songs or stories
What do they like about the mountains - what will they miss when move?
Wildlife in mountains - memories, stories and changes
Roads - impact of roads; how did they travel when no roads?

Personal histories and stories
Have they always lived in this place? What are your favourite or strongest memories?

The village
Special places: sacred places, powerful places, places important to individuals
Graves and graveyards
Social organisations and networks
Village history - relationship with other villages
How does the village receive information?

Social justice - crime
Is there much crime in the village - has this changed?
How are disputes solved - has this changed?

Chiefs and other authorities
Chiefs you have been ruled by - what does your chief mean to you?
What relationship do you have with other authorities; village development committees, government?

Livelihoods
How do you make your living? How did you make it in the past?
What do you have to buy because you can't make or grow it?
What do you gather and use from the mountains (eg wild plants, herbs)?
Will it be the same in new place?

Agriculture
Crops, yields - in the past and now. Markets for your produce - in the past and now
Growing marijuana - is compensation a problem for this crop?

Livestock
Importance of livestock as wealth, gifts, status, security
Livestock management, herding, breeding

Other employment
Other employment in the village - what is available?
Reasons for going to work outside the village or staying at home
Work in the mines - what was it like - effect of the loss of mining work on village and family

Land
The importance of land to people - are attitudes to land changing?
Different types of land use - agriculture, grazing, communal grazing land
Management of grazing; grazing associations and grazing fees
Access to land - ownership
Feelings about loss of land

Weather and environmental changes
Is the land being degraded? What are the reasons for this?
Is the climate changing? Memories of drought, extreme winters etc

Resettlement
Impact of the water project so far - jobs, construction of roads
Where have you chosen to move and why?
If you are moving to a town/lowland village, what are your expectations of life there?
How did you choose which kind of compensation to take?
How do you feel about different levels of compensation?
If you are taking cash compensation, how do you plan to use the money?
How are you preparing yourself for the change?
What relations do you have with the receiving community?
What was your experience of the compensation negotiations and process?
Was it different for women and men?
Did you choose who to move with?
How do you feel about being under a new chief's jurisdiction?
What do you feel about the new house you will have?

Session 3. How to interview: questions

- Discuss the role of the topic list, so that interviewers understand that they do not have to follow the list of topics strictly but should use their own judgement about which issues to follow when, and what to ignore. It is extremely unlikely that they would want to cover all the topics with every narrator; most narrators will be more knowledgeable about or interested in just some of the issues/events. The important thing is to ensure that the overall collection covers the full range of issues and concerns identified.

- Develop a few questions for each topic, making sure they are understood and acceptable. If the interviewers ask each other the questions in the language in which they will be interviewing, it may raise issues of translation, or of cultural appropriateness, which should be resolved now. This is an important opportunity for them to comment on the topic list, to refine or improve it. Sometimes the way a question is first phrased may not make sense to local people. An example in China was a question directed at women; "Could you sacrifice yourself so that your husband could become successful?" A peasant woman couldn't understand the question. Her husband came in and explained it to her as: "Would you kill yourself if I became successful?" Clearly, it made no sense to either of them.

- Give some examples of open-ended questions, secondary questions etc. You can adapt or use the photocopiable box *Types of question* (see Chapter 4, pp45-46).

- Remind the interviewers that the emphasis is not on documenting facts and events, but on uncovering their meaning to people. You can adapt or use the photocopiable box *Questions to elicit meaning* (see Chapter 4, p44). Think about the secondary questions which will elicit reflection, observation, analysis, and anecdote.

- Use role play (see p34), and encourage the interviewers to experiment and see how different approaches elicit different types of answers. They should become familiar with the different kinds of questioning technique outlined in the two boxes mentioned above, and really get a feel for those which elicit detailed, personal responses. Using Chapter 4 again, look at the section of *Types of interview* and *Topics for a life story* to help everyone think more tangibly about the questions they may ask.

- Emphasise the fact that questions which draw on the narrator's personal experience will be much more successful than more general ones. Similarly, if you want to introduce broad topics, focus on more specific aspects. You will get much more

accurate, detailed and interesting information if you ask people about their individual actions and feelings, responses and experiences. Otherwise you run the risk of getting superficial answers or received wisdom on many issues, which may not reflect reality. "How has the mining industry affected this region?" is likely to elicit a general answer, and probably most people will say much the same. Questions which focus on the narrator's own experience of the impacts of the industry and those of others in his/her family will be more detailed (and may then give rise to wider reflection).

- Stress that difficult questions do not have to be answered: if a narrator is unwilling to talk about something, s/he should be encouraged but not forced.

- Decide what opening lines are appropriate, and the polite formulae for establishing a proper atmosphere for interviews with different people. Ensure that any interviewers who are not local know the proper greetings, customary behaviour etc for the various narrators/communities.

- This manual will be used by people in a variety of different cultures and contexts. The only universal rule should be that interviewers are familiar with and operate within whatever the appropriate cultural forms of conversation and communication may be. What is merely probing for information for some, can be deemed intrusive or threatening by others. For example, certain questions that in some cultures would seem neutral and rather mundane, such as "How many children do you have?", may prove offensive. Interviewers in a project in the Sahel region of Africa, who eventually recorded conversations with some 500 mainly elderly men and women, knew that for many of them to divulge this information to a stranger could be perceived as tempting fate - an open invitation to God to take a child away. They found other ways to get this family history.

Session 4. How to interview: relationships and ethics

- Having raised the issues of cultural appropriateness, this is a good time to talk about some of the more ethical issues (see Chapter 2, p20). In particular, you may need to consider certain issues which arise when interviewing particular groups (see *Interview relationships* Chapter 2, p21). Discussing the scenarios on p35, and/or other examples which you think of which may be relevant, should help stimulate discussion about these aspects.

- Discuss how to introduce the project to narrators, and what benefits there may be for them. Make sure everyone has the same ideas and information about this.

The box on the following page contains some hypothetical situations, variants of which may arise in the course of your project. Although the social, political and cultural situations within which our partners and recipients of this manual live and work will vary considerably, some of these scenarios, or adaptations of them, are likely to raise relevant ethical and other questions. It may be worth taking some time in the training workshop, either at this point or towards the end, to debate any of these scenarios which could be applicable to your project. Encourage everyone to give their views or to suggest other possible scenarios.

Session 5. How to interview: practicalities

- Discuss some of the practical aspects of conducting the interviews (equipment, travel arrangements etc), and the problems and issues that may arise (see Chapter 4).

- Before the practice interviews take place (see Day 3), make sure the interview team are familiar with the recording equipment. At the very least, make sure that they spend enough time with the tape recorders to be fully confident about their operation. Again, the best way to prepare them for interviewing is through role play (see below).

Role play

Working in pairs, the interviewing team should all gain experience of being both narrator and interviewer. Often, this session just takes off, and people enjoy the process, but they can also role play at being:

- the insensitive or aggressive interviewer
- the interviewer who talks too much or keeps interrupting
- the uncommunicative respondent, who just gives one word answers
- the narrator who won't keep to the point
- the interviewer who always uses leading questions

Use the box, *Types of question* (pp45-46), and practice the different kinds - open, closed, and leading etc. Analyse each other's questions: how productive or appropriate were they? Role play is fun, and can do much to build people's confidence before they undertake interviewing for real.

Scenarios for discussion

- You have been interviewing a woman about growing up in a children's home. She has been very forthcoming about her experiences and has seemed comfortable relating them to you. You decide to ask more about her mother, at which point she begins to cry. How do you handle this?

- You are researching into changing perceptions of marriage and are interviewing a woman about her own marriage. She is talking very freely about her situation when her husband walks in on the interview and sits down next to her. She freezes, and he starts answering your questions. What do you do?

- You are a fieldworker with a local development NGO, interviewing a landowner in the middle income range of a relatively poor region. The aim is to build up a community history, and explore social and economic change over the last 50 years. It is soon clear that he is going out of his way to praise the work of your organisation, and you begin to suspect he is underplaying his assets and tailoring his answers in order not to disqualify himself for any development assistance which might come from your NGO. What do you do?

- You are interviewing a local farmer, whom you have known for a long time, about the changing environment and its impact on agriculture. She takes the opportunity to repeat, at length, allegations against a neighbour whom she accuses of stealing a large portion of her land. Familiar with the case, you know this not to be true. Do you let her continue until she "runs out of steam", contradict her, or try to change the subject as quickly as possible?

- You have spent many hours over a number of weeks interviewing members of a community about the history of development interventions in their region. In the course of the interviews, there have been repeated veiled references to corrupt practice by the same development fieldworker, apparently undetected by the NGO which employs him. What do you do?

- You are interviewing someone about their experience of conflict. She recounts several of her war experiences in great detail, seemingly comfortable in sharing her stories. Taking her lead, you ask her some more personal details about fighting at which point she clams up and will not speak. Do you push her; try to find another way to ask the question; or leave it?

Session 6. Rules and advice on transcription

Using Chapter 7, give everyone some basic information on how to transcribe, and try to ensure that people follow the same style.

Day 3
Session 7. Practice interviews in the field.

- Each trainee interviewer should conduct one practice interview, of about one hour. These should be arranged by the coordinator in advance of the workshop, so that the interviewers do not have to "trap" unwilling or bemused narrators who have had no prior notice.

- If the workshop is being held some distance away from the site of most of the interviewing, the practice day at least should be on site. If time and numbers permit, interviewers could work in pairs, so that each has a chance to observe as well as conduct an interview. This provides an excellent opportunity to assess their own (and each other's) performances, and discuss it while the experience is still fresh.

- Interviewers should immediately start to transcribe their interviews.

Day 4

Session 8. Reviewing the experience

- Either in the evening of Day 3 or first thing on Day 4, it is a good idea to get everyone together and get the team to report back informally on their practice sessions. Each interviewer could *very* briefly summarise the texts of their pilot interview, and they can exchange experiences, and discuss any difficulties - and successes - encountered.

- Later in the course of Day 4, when they have managed quite a lot of transcription, the coordinator(s) could start to look at the testimonies in more detail, and if time is limited, could choose just one or two interviews for review. If translation for reviewing purposes is required, because for example, a minority language was involved, it is most unlikely for there to be enough time for more than one or two selections to be translated and circulated to all participants.

- Transcription is hard work, so encourage interviewers to take a break every now and then, and to listen to each other's tapes.

- Coordinators and any other participants not directly involved in interviewing should take the opportunity to go over the plans so far, including ideas for using the

testimonies within the participating communities/region. They should also write up
and distribute any notes/information/checklists the interviewers will need.

Day 5

Session 9. Reviewing the practice testimonies

- Unless there has been time in Day 4, the morning of Day 5 is the time to have a full
review of the practice interviews. All participants should have had a chance to listen
to or read some of the testimonies. The team should be encouraged to comment on
their own interviews and what they have learnt (this self-review can be particularly
helpful), as well as on each others' interviews.

- A sample testimony (or extracts from several) can be examined in detail by the
coordinators/other participants and interviewers. Use the boxes, *Interview Content*
and *Interview Technique*, on page 62 to help with this process.

- This review can be one of the most enlightening sessions of the workshop. Theory
comes alive and people really begin to see the difference between types of
questioning, and appreciate how much greater the response can be with the right
approach.

- Points where different questions could have been asked or more information sought
will be identified and discussed. This exercise is about learning, but also about
confidence-building, so be careful to offer criticism constructively and positively.

- Things to watch out for in interviewers: the over-confident "I don't need to be told what
to do" (almost always these have proved to be poor interviewers when it came to the
real thing); and a tendency to dwell excessively on people's personal details. Two
examples from experience: a couple of interviewers who kept asking about men's sex
lives; and one who went into too much detail about a woman's relationship with a
violent and difficult husband. Not only can this be offensive or upsetting to some
people, if the conversation doesn't ultimately relate this information to the wider
context - the women's family, village, society etc - it is of limited value and becomes
uncomfortably voyeuristic. And in the latter case, it may have triggered difficult
feelings for the narrator which the interviewer ultimately did nothing to resolve or
alleviate.

- This session may also give rise to comments on transcription and, if appropriate,
translation (see Chapter 7).

Session 10. Refining the project

- The topic list may be revised and amended in the light of the review session, and some changes in approach or content may be identified.

- The final (probably afternoon) discussion should focus on the location and range of narrators, ensuring as representative a spread as possible of the communities concerned, and of people who can talk about the concerns, events and issues identified. You may need to ensure a range of age, occupation, and social group as well. You should also think about the gender balance you need and about the schedule for the field work. If possible, plan a review meeting about half way through the fieldwork; this can help greatly with both the organisation and quality of the testimony collection (see Chapter 6).

- Finally, run through the ideas again for the follow-up activities planned. Arrange to discuss some of these with the narrators, and other members of the community. Ask the interviewers to make sure they take account of their comments or any other ideas which they may have, and feed them back to project coordinator(s) etc. Remember those individuals/organisations you identified as being able to provide social/cultural/ environmental/economic/political/historical background - might they review some of the final interviews for balance and accuracy? You could also discuss potential follow-up activities involving these organisations if appropriate.

A sample timetable for a workshop follows. Panos has found that being prepared to be flexible when running a workshop is vital. The timetable is an outline only – you may have to move sessions around to accommodate visits by outside contributors, other people's schedules, and ideas for extra sessions that may emerge during the workshop.

Sample timetable for a workshop

SESSION	MAIN CONTRIBUTORS	CONTENT
Day one – am		
Introductions	Institutions involved (if relevant)	Broadly what they do and the relevance of the project to them
	Individuals eg interviewers, potential reviewers or advisors	What they do, what their interest in the project is
The project	Coordinator	How idea originated, what the aims and objectives are
Oral testimony: "Amplifying voices"	Coordinator/trainer/ Facilitator	Why use this methodology, the kind of information it is best suited to gather, how it complements other research
Day one - pm		
Setting the scene	Coordinator/Everyone	May include more background on history, culture, development concerns etc
The main topics to be covered by the project	Everyone	Brainstorm - people's concerns, hopes, experiences, changes etc
Day two - am		
Further background if necessary	A specialist (eg gender, environment) plus participants	For example, gender issues and how these relate to concerns raised so far
Refining the topics to be explored in the interviews	Everyone	Begin to pull together the brainstorming into ideas, themes, key issues Sample questions
Day two – pm		
Oral testimony - preparation, approach, kinds of questions, ethics	Trainer/facilitator/ Coordinator	Methodology and practice re. oral testimony collection, using topic list to think of sample questions Debate ethical and other scenarios
Practical training and role play	Trainer/facilitator/ Coordinator	Methodology and practice re. oral testimony collection, familiarisation with tape recorders etc, role play, advice on transcription
Day three		
Practice interviews	Interviewers	Do practice interviews, ideally on site, and begin transcription
	Coordinator(s) and other participants not involved in interviewing	Some supervision of practice interviewing, some visiting of sites, and review of workshop so far. More discussion of follow-up activities
Day four		
Reviewing the experience	Interviewers	Feedback on practice interviews and process. Transcription (usually lasts for the rest of the day)
	Trainer/facilitator/ Coordinator	Choosing some sections of practice interviews for review. Planning and coordination meeting
Day five		
Reviewing the practice testimonies	Everyone	Review of some practice testimonies. Difficulties encountered and how to deal with them. Amend topics and approach in light of this.
Refining the project	Everyone	Initial selection of narrators (age, gender, occupation etc). Refining of projects, schedules etc Participants' feedback on workshop

Chapter 4: Preparing for the Interview

- **Equipment**
- **Types of interview**
- **Topics for a life story**
- **Ways to elicit information**
- **Preparing questions**
- **Questions to elicit meaning**
- **Types of questions**

Equipment

Panos suggests that all interviews are tape-recorded. What type of equipment you use depends on what you wish to use the tapes for.

If the tapes are to be transcribed and used in written form only, then a small cassette recorder with a built-in microphone is sufficient. Panos partners, usually because of low funds, have almost always used this kind of recorder. The tapes can be copied and distributed for discussion purposes, and the quality is usually sufficient. And remember that however good the equipment, the end result can still be poor quality if the interviewer doesn't avoid background noise etc. It does not seem to make much difference to the narrator which type of equipment is used, although the built-in microphone is less intrusive.

If the interviews, or parts thereof, might be broadcast on radio, or used as tapes in any educational or training forum, you should ideally use professional-quality equipment with a separate microphone. The interviewers may need training in using this properly. However, even when testimonies have been used to make radio programmes, Panos found that the need to edit the original - you might need only 5 minutes of a one-and-a-half hour interview - has sometimes meant it was easier to re-record the selected text. And if the broadcast is not going to be in the original language, then you are going to have to re-record anyway.

Whatever the level of sophistication you choose, tape recorders should always be of the type which can both record and play back. This is important in order to: (a) demonstrate the tape recorder to the narrator, and (b) facilitate transcription. Ideally recorders also have a tape counter, which makes transcription easier, and later helps you locate particular sections of interview on the tape. They should also have a battery light, so it doesn't run out without you knowing. Finally, the tape recorders are likely to have quite a lot of wear and tear and need to be sturdy. Avoid models which feel a bit flimsy.

For the same reason, always use 60 minute tapes; the 90 minute ones have a tendency to stretch and break with repeated use, as happens during transcription.

The model numbers of tape recorders do change. In 1998-99 we used SONY TCM-459V and AIWA TPVS 600. Neither of these are professional standard, but they proved adequate for the task. Many of these kind of recorders now feature VOR (Voice Operated Recording). This should be turned OFF. The recording does not start quickly enough on picking up a voice, and so loses the beginning of sentences etc.

Types of interview

You can take different approaches to gathering testimony, depending on the project's objectives. You may wish to consider some of these variants:

1. Individual life story, ranging across all sectors of someone's life
2. An issue-focused interview, focusing primarily on particular aspects of someone's experiences, such as his/her working life, or the impacts of a particular event (such as drought, or war, or resettlement). By gathering multiple interviews and seeing what themes arise, it is often possible – within a range of highly individual accounts - to identify common or otherwise significant elements of concern, belief or practice
3. Group discussion (ranging from, say, a husband and wife, to larger groups defined by age, occupation etc)

On the whole, the focus of Panos' partners has been less on gathering conventional life histories and more on gaining understanding of issues related to development, therefore using the second approach above. Yet the historical perspective has always been important, and the interview is always firmly located in individual experience. So the list of topics overleaf (adapted from *Listening for a Change*) may contain useful suggestions for subjects to explore.

The most important thing to remember, though, is that each narrator is an individual, and the most valuable information you will get will be that which reflects their first-hand experience. Therefore no two interviews should be alike, with exactly the same questions. They will have some questions in common - those needed to elicit basic information and biographical data (see p43), and to identify particular themes and issues (and compare different responses to the same points) - but then the interview should develop in ways which draw upon the narrator's personal experiences.

Topics for a life story

One of the great advantages of a life story interview is that it tracks a person's experience across all the different economic and social sectors of their life.

To do this effectively, an interview needs to cover a certain cross-section of topics. These can be divided into three main sections.

1. Family and early life
- Family background: grandparents, elderly relations, extended family, and their influence
- Parents: where they came from, their occupations and roles in the family, their personalities, and the narrator's relationship with them
- Brothers, sisters and childhood friends: children's responsibilities, games and leisure activities, childhood journeys; what happened to siblings and childhood friends in later life
- Everyday life: the home environment; who did the domestic work, cooking etc; food and mealtimes etc
- Special occasions: weddings, funerals, festivals and initiations
- Local geography: the community, village or town; communal areas, land rights and ownership; markets, meeting places and other significant places; neighbours, important people and interesting characters
- Social and cultural life: religion and politics; education and instruction at home, school or work; important friendships, influences and ambitions

2. Working life
- Occupation(s) inside and outside the home: domestic, agricultural, vocational, professional, formal, informal, paid and unpaid
- How the skills were learnt; the work environment; what the work involves and who with; any formal or informal training or apprenticeship; any changes of occupation and why; successes and failures in working life
- Other income-generating opportunities, eg crafts, brewing, petty trading
- A typical working day: seasonal variations
- Important influences at work: mentors, colleagues, friends, enemies
- Work-related organisations: cooperatives, informal groups, professional organisations, unions; any social life connected with work
- Wider changes affecting work: environmental, industrial, political

3. Adult family and social life
- Central relationships: single, married, separated, divorced or widowed; monogamous or polygamous; the meeting of partner(s), their background and occupation; any wedding; setting up or joining a household, who controls money and assets, the division of work and decision-making; expectations and ideals of marriage, the family home, children; childbirth, family planning, childcare, ideals of parenting, affection and discipline; hopes and ambitions for children; the deaths of partners and family members. If single or childless: by choice or circumstance; attitude of others to this
- Leisure activities: adult leisure and hobbies; friends and relationships; music, dance, drama, story-telling; entertaining, local groups or clubs; the community, the neighbours
- Old age: becoming grandparents and/or other rights, responsibilities, privileges or difficulties which come with age

Remember that a life story interview can often have a profound effect on the narrator, who may have never told someone their memories before and certainly is unlikely to have recalled their whole life in the course of a few hours. For most people, recounting their life story is a positive, if emotional, experience from which they can gain much satisfaction and a renewed sense of perspective, but the listener should always ensure that the narrator is comfortable at the end of the interview and is surrounded by any support they need, whether of family or friends.

Ways to elicit information

Whatever type of interview you are carrying out it is important to begin with obtaining some basic biographical data from the narrator such as:

- **their name**
- **when and where they were born**
- **their occupation(s)**

- **where their parents live(d)**
- **what their parents do/did**
- **what family they have**

This information will provide you with the necessary context for your interview. In addition, most of these questions will be relatively easy for the narrator to answer and may help them to feel comfortable right from the beginning of the interview.

It can take time for a narrator to relax into their story, or they may need some help remembering events. If they have photographs or pictures on display which might be relevant, or you have something like a newspaper cutting, community photograph or some other artefact, start asking them about these items. It might help to show them a time-line, if one was drawn up at the workshop, and get their comments on it, or you might even ask them to draw a simple map or time-line to clarify their description of something. All these things can act as aide-memoires, or simply get the conversation flowing. Often, such "prompts" are not necessary.

Sometimes a narrator turns out to be unforthcoming, and no amount of encouragement will make them responsive. This is no-one's fault, and it may be best to terminate the interview early, but with politeness and consideration.

Preparing questions

If you have participated in a workshop along the lines described in Chapter 3, you should have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the kinds of questions you can use, and how they will assist in gathering the testimony you want. The following boxes: *Questions to elicit meaning* (p44) and *Types of question* (pp 45-46) will have been used in the workshop. Use them to remind yourself of good interview techniques.

Questions to elicit meaning

Remember that we are as interested in peoples' **understanding** of and **feelings** about events and changes, at least as much as in the events/changes themselves. How do people make sense of the past, and of what is happening now? Do they think about it in more than one way? What is their interpretation of events? So key concepts are:

VALUES
PERCEPTIONS
EXPERIENCES
PRIORITIES

Since some of these key words may not have an exact translation, you may wish to spend some time discussing their meaning and finding the most suitable equivalent word or phrase.

To uncover this kind of **qualitative** information, certain kinds of questions are very useful for follow-up, and for exploring the **meaning** and **significance** of events described or information given by the narrator.

- Why do you think this happened?
- What do/did you feel about this?
- What do you think the meaning of this is/was?
- How important is/was this to you/your family/community?
- How does/did this affect you/your family/community?
- How is this different to the past/now?
- Why do you think this changed/happens?
- What is your own experience of this practice/event?
- Why did you/your family community make this decision?
- Did you feel you have/had a choice?
- In what ways could things have been easier/better/more helpful?

Types of question

1. OPEN Questions
Most of the questions you ask in an interview should be of this nature. They encourage the narrator to expand upon the topic and to give their own views and interpretation. Open questions don't assume answers, or direct the narrator, in the way that leading questions do.
 Examples:
> Can you tell me the story of what happened then?
> How did you feel about that?
> What was your mother's reaction to this?
> How did the soldiers treat you?

2. CLOSED Questions
These tend to elicit "yes/no" answers and little else. They are useful to establish detail, or to clarify matters, but should almost always be followed by open-ended questions.
Examples:
> (Closed) Did you leave then? Yes/No
> (Open) How did you feel about that decision?
>
> (Closed) Had you met him/her before? Yes/No
> (Open) What was your impression when you first met?

3. LEADING Questions
These tend to assume an answer and may well lead the narrator to respond with a simple yes or no, or, more significantly, to follow the suggested line more than they would with an open question. On the whole they should be avoided.
Examples:
> Was that helpful?
> Weren't you furious when they changed their plans?
> Did the soldiers treat you roughly?
>
> Did you resent the landlord?
> *An open question would be:* How did you feel about the landlord?
> Are young people less respectful today?
> *An open question would be:* How do you feel about young people today?

Sometimes they may even offend or intimidate, especially if the interviewer thereby reveals disapproval or disdain. For example*:*
> Wasn't the attitude of the villagers very conservative?
> Wasn't it short-sighted of you to clear that land?

4. DOUBLE-BARRELLED Questions
These can confuse, and almost always the respondent answers only one of the questions. Again, they should be avoided.
Examples:
> When did you marry and what does your husband do?
> Is there more crime today and why do you think this is?

Types of question (continued)

5. PRECISION Questions
Sometimes necessary (as are yes/no questions) in order to build up or clarify information.
Examples:
> What was the name of your home town?
> How old were you when you left?

6. PROMPTS
These help elicit more detail. They might also be used in conjunction with a photograph, time-line, or some other item which has meaning for the narrator.
Examples:
> Can you explain a bit more about this?
> Can you describe what happens during [this activity]?
> Can you tell me how you used this?

7. OBLIQUE Questions
Sometimes it is hard for someone to answer something by relating it to themselves, because it may implicate them in a way which is worrying, or is just too personal. But if the topic can be discussed in the third person, they may be happy to give an honest reply, based on their own experience.
Example:
> I've heard some refugees sell their rations - what do you think about this?
This is more likely to be successful than: Do you sell your rations on the black market?

8. STATEMENT questions
As above, using a statement (but ensuring it is as neutral as possible), followed by a question, can be a way of raising a sensitive issue without making it too personal. It is also helpful when you need to change the subject and introduce a new topic.
Example:
> I believe the government has recently banned the traditional practice of ********. What do you think about the government's action?

9. SANCTIONING questions
Another way of dealing with potentially sensitive issues is known as "sanctioning". Again, the interviewer, recognising the situation, paves the way for the narrator to give an answer which they might otherwise have been inhibited from doing. Perhaps, for example, social values have changed and you are asking them to describe something which by today's standards would be disapproved of. Acknowledge that "things were different" and the values of the past were quite normal then. This same approach could also apply when interviewing about times when normal values break down, such as during war, and different standards of behaviour apply.
Example:
> I know many parents in those days used a stick to punish their children. What did your parents do?

Asking narrators about place names can reveal some interesting information relating to more than just geography. The box below provides further detail on this.

Place Names

The history of place names plays a key part in landmapping surveys. These surveys vary in complexity and approach, but essentially involve asking people to draw (where possible) and describe the sites, place names, history and uses (hunting and gathering areas, water sources etc) of all the land used by them in their lifetimes, and where possible those of their ancestors. The oral evidence gathered this way has supported traditional people's claims to lands which they didn't own in the modern legal sense, but to which they do have rights.

In an oral testimony project, it can be useful to pay attention to this aspect of people's history. Place names often tell a story, so ask about the name and its meaning.
Place names may:

- reflect a physical feature, eg a hill, a valley, water hole; or a man-made feature eg settlement or farm
- be named after an individual eg Gabarone, Johannesburg
- be named after an event such as a battle eg Bulawayo = the place of killing
- be named after something which is found there eg "the place of deer", "the place of many lions", "the place of God's water" or something more specific eg Shakawe, which is the name of a herb
- be named after something which is/was always done there eg Khootkase, which means "the place where they used to wet the leather for tanning"

Sometimes the changes in place names can be revealing. In a workshop with San people in Botswana, they told how a place nearby was first known as Gantsii which means "round buttocks", indicating a place of plentiful food. Now the Tswana word Gantsi is being increasingly adopted (but not by the San), which means "place of flies", a reflection of the general prejudice against Bushmen and their settlements.

Travelling

Generally, Panos' partners are already familiar with the community and individuals concerned. However, in any interviewing team the degree of familiarity will vary, especially where interviewing means travelling to different sites. In one of Panos' multi-region projects, the focus was on highland communities. The aim was to record and communicate their experiences and perceptions of social, cultural, environmental and economic change, and of the increasing impact of development, often driven by lowland,

urban and/or industrial demands for resources. The interviewers were all locally based, but often had to visit different communities, separated by steep valleys, and were away for days at a time.

If interviewing does involve travel, remember to make appointments (although poor communication infrastructure sometimes renders this difficult) and a *realistic* journey plan. Don't let people down or keep them waiting by underestimating travel time or other factors.

If you are visiting a community new to you, do your homework. It can be insulting to people if you are ignorant of the basic information about their lives and communities. Get to know as much as you can about the immediate area and any locally specific issues. Use official contacts, traditional figures of authority etc, as well as informal ones eg friends, relations. Before you leave, make sure you have:

- your equipment (recorder, maps, stationary, camera if necessary, spare tapes, batteries, medicines)
- any necessary letters of introduction/explanation
- your topic list
- any prompts or memory triggers, such as photographs, time-lines
- enough finance

For a full **Interview checklist**, see Chapter 5, p60.

Finally, as you prepare for the interview, remember that some of the most important questions you will ask are those highlighted in the box: **Questions to elicit meaning**. These help you to explore the meaning of the information you are being given. These are a crucial part of the interview. If you fail to ask any of these kind of questions, you risk getting no more than the most general of answers, which give no hint of that individual's personal experience or viewpoint.

Chapter 5: The Interview

- **Collecting material**
- **Attitudes**
- **Before the interview**

- **Conduct during the interview**
- **After the interview**
- **Summaries**

If you are facilitating a workshop, you may find much of this and the previous chapter especially useful. Some sections could be photocopied and distributed to participants; other sections might form the basis for a talk or discussion.

Collecting material

Gathering personal interviews should never be a question of "grab it and go". Take your time. You can learn a lot from interaction and general conversation - the more you do this, the better the actual interview will be, and the greater your understanding of the narrator's perspective. There are broadly three kinds of material which could contribute to the interview:

- Information - elicited through conversation and interaction. You have to exercise a certain amount of selection as to what you pursue, but don't ignore any information. But remember that you are searching for the meaning and significance of information, rather than merely accumulating detail
- Performance - embracing stories, songs, recitations. It may be spontaneous (when you just come across it) or solicited (when you request a story, for example)
- Your observations and impressions - less tangible, and not necessarily recorded. Make notes as things occur or as soon as possible after the interview

A project focusing on oral artistry will concentrate mostly on performance. Most of Panos' partners were not specialists in oral artistry and focused on information, but some interviews did contain stories, songs and poems.

Anecdotes

Anecdotal evidence is the heart of oral evidence. Anecdotes may contradict declared opinions or received wisdom - and so reveal interesting attitudes. Our Kenyan partners, for example, when interviewing on the topic of circumcision found that several people told a story about a man who - unusually - refused to undergo this ritual practice. In doing so, they revealed a different side to the issue. While most people subscribed to the consensus on the continuing value of circumcision, by telling a story about a third party who did not, an individual could express a view which was otherwise difficult to voice openly, or which contradicted their own earlier statements. So ask for stories, their

own and those which they've been told by others. Sometimes this is the route to the sub-text, the story below the surface.

Attitudes

This section is about the way you relate to what you are doing, and it is important. Oral testimony is a particular kind of information gathering, and if you are used to surveys or more quantitative research, you may have to adapt your approach. Remember, we are the ones who are ignorant and anxious to learn - we are not the "experts" in their lives.

Be good listeners. This cannot be stressed enough.
- You must want to learn. You must keep an open mind, and pick up and follow lines of interest as they emerge. You are looking for insights, not just information.

Be alert
- Some of what you learn is not what you are told, but what you notice. Research doesn't start just when you enter the research "scene". Part of the training is about developing awareness. Observation is important, because what people *say* they do isn't always what they do. The difference between rhetoric and reality is usually illuminating; local knowledge helps an interviewer spot some of these discrepancies.

Behave appropriately
- Show politeness and respect (this includes dressing appropriately)
- Show interest and friendship - you should feel genuine warmth and response to the narrator. Communication is much easier if people feel comfortable with you
- Respect customs and observances, privacy and requests for anonymity
- Employ patience, tolerance, understanding - remember you are the intruder in the narrators' lives, and they may have work to do, but with this in mind, use graceful firmness and be on guard against self-promoters and hecklers
- Acknowledge people's contributions. Show appreciation and gratitude - for being both received and informed

Employ tact
- We are not winning an argument, we are eliciting information and insight. We *ask* for material, not demand. You mustn't scare off the narrator, or make them feel that you are "more educated". We should recognise our own areas of ignorance and that education can take us away from our roots. You may need to compromise or make concessions at times in the conversation.

- However, although respect for one's informant is the priority, occasionally it might be appropriate to challenge or press the narrator a little on a subject. Narrators are responsible individuals, capable of debate, but always exercise tact and sensitivity: you are trying to *understand* their point of view, not *change* it.

- Always remember that it is what the narrator believes to be true that matters to us, not what you believe, or what you regard to be a fact.

- Ways of following through areas of possible confusion/contradiction include:
  "I may be wrong but I thought …
  "I stand to be corrected, but doesn't …
  This gives people the confidence to correct you.
  Another example: "They may be wrong, the people that say this - what is your view?"

- You must avoid giving any impression that you are *testing* the narrator – or any implication that you have the answers and are checking to see if they have them too.

Before the interview

- Familiarise yourself with the equipment beforehand, especially if it's complicated. Outside recordings are usually better, but choose a place which is quiet enough. Avoid noisy roads, ceiling fans, playgrounds, building sites, rustling plants. Direct the microphone down-wind.

- Watch the batteries and the running length of tape. This can be especially important with musical performances - for these you may also have to make some adjustment to sound levels.

- You might want to pre-record the basic details of the interview: interviewer, narrator, time, date, location.

- Don't get distracted by your equipment - it can intimidate or put off the narrator. Do play back a few bits of conversation/chat at the very beginning. It breaks the ice, and allows you to check the sound level (this is important).

Location

- If you isolate narrators too much from the community, this might not be a good idea, and it might arouse people's suspicions, so use your judgement and knowledge of cultural custom about whether to record in isolation. But if there are onlookers, request silence within reasonable and polite limits, and make sure they aren't inhibiting or directing the narrator.

- In certain circumstances, you may have to interview women while they perform some domestic duties, because time free from work is rare. Women also tend to prefer to be interviewed in their homes, but this can mean they are frequently distracted by children or visitors as well as chores. Be sensitive to the situation, and arrange another time if the interviewing is causing too much disruption to the narrator or to others with whom her work is linked. For example, one trainee persisted with an interview with a woman who was in a chain of people passing and sorting stones on a hillside. It made the woman uncomfortable, it was hard for her to concentrate on both tasks, and eventually it threw everyone's work out of step.

- Groups are useful for discussion and to select individuals, but remember we are looking for personal experience, not official representation.

Reactions/responses

- Don't rush into the interview. Give narrators time to relax, to feel comfortable.

- It's important to react, to *show* you're listening, but there are some culturally specific issues here. To what extent do you hold people's gaze, respond to what they're saying? For example, in Kenya a younger person interviewing an older one should not continually look them in the eye. As a rule of thumb, though, the more established a relationship is, the better. The interview may seem to last a long time (likely to be well over an hour), but it *shouldn't* feel false or embarrassing. Ideally, the rapport between narrator and interviewer is good enough that it feels more like an extended conversation than an interview.

Conduct during the interview

You need to strike a balance between your own particular interests, that of the wider project, and those of the narrator. Key qualities to have are patience, enthusiasm and commitment.

1. You should know the topics well enough before the interview begins, so that you do not keep referring to the topic list during the interview. This can be distracting. You may find it helpful, especially in your early interviews, to have the topic list with you, in case you lose your train of thought. If you have any photographs to act as memory triggers, you might find it helpful to use them.

2. Make sure the opening lines are culturally/locally appropriate.

3. Introduce yourself, explain the project and make sure the narrator understands what use is to be made of the interview. Also make sure the narrator understands the interview's purpose and nature: it's not a survey, not a list of questions, but an opportunity for them to give their thoughts on some issues.

4. Demonstrate the tape recorder, to check it is working and the sound level, but also as an "ice-breaker". Let the narrator hear the sound of their own voice, and yours.

5. Make sure you have the narrator's name, and repeat it ("we are talking to …") so s/he can correct any mistakes you make. This also gives them confidence. It's a good strong start, and establishes that you know them and, importantly, that they have the right to correct you. So get the details (name, place etc) and repeat them as the introduction rather than beginning with the more tentative "what's your name, how old are you ...".

6. During the interview, it is best not to take too many notes: this can distract and break the flow of talk, and where the narrator is illiterate it can emphasise the gap between narrator and interviewer. However, if something comes up which you know you should follow up later, note it down (trying not to forget it may affect your concentration!). You may also need to jot down names/places (for accuracy) and non-verbal communications.

7. Do not expect to get precise references in terms of distance, time, years etc. Try to establish such things in terms which make sense personally/locally. Often significant local events (a major flood, an important political event) or stages in the lifecycle are the "markers" by which people remember things. In a village in Lesotho, for example, one old man describing the community's history said, "Our grandmothers settled here during the time of the dust." This is how the Basotho describe the time of the 1930s depression, a time of drought followed by famine. It was preceded by clouds of dust so thick that the sunlight was obliterated and people had to light candles.

8. Be alert for references such as the example above, which may not be clear to someone unfamiliar with the region. These could include place names, dates, ages, references to historical events or persons, or local customs. If necessary, ask the narrator to explain these before the interview is over, or be prepared to go back later to seek clarification.

9. Always try to end the interview on a positive note (do *not* ask the narrator to recall their greatest regret or saddest memory!). Always remember to ask them if they have anything to add to their narrative; something they wish to talk about which hasn't yet come up in the conversation. Take time to relax with them. Don't just rush off.

10. Immediately after the interview, make any necessary notes for identification and clarification. These are the results of what you have observed as well as heard. They may include explanations of difficult, old or traditional words, social customs, use of language, idiosyncratic terms etc. If in doubt, ask about them before leaving. Try to explain unexpected or unconventional usage, technical terms, geographical references - anything, broadly speaking, which is locally, culturally or personally specific which would not be clear to others. Later, these may be attached to the transcript.

11. It's a good idea to write a brief review of the interview as soon as possible after it is finished, as a memory prompt and back-up to the tapes. This should contain basic information about the narrator (name, age, sex, location, education, occupation, religion/ethnic group etc) and some notes on the main points of the conversation, including non-verbal expressions and other observations if relevant, and your feelings about it. This will help you in monitoring and evaluating the project, and perhaps learning how to improve it. It will also provide the basis for an interview summary (see **Summaries**, pp57-59).

12. Don't leave it too long to do the transcription (see Chapter 7). The longer you leave it, the harder it becomes.

Key points

- The best and most useful information is usually that based on personal experience (but always bear in mind culture and custom, and respect people's desire for privacy)

- You are looking for meaning and significance, values and attitudes, not just factual information

- Ask why the narrator made certain decisions or why they think things happened the way that they did

- Always ask for individual detail, illustrations and examples – it helps to stimulate memories, and to balance generalisations or bland statements which may not reflect personal experience

- A different approach on a topic covered earlier may produce new information

- Investigate gaps and alternatives – was there something the narrator always wanted to do? To be? To visit? This may reveal something important about aspirations and values

- Don't try to cover everything, and don't stick rigidly to the topic list. Follow your narrator's train of thought, but bring them back tactfully if they are completely wandering off the point of the interview

- Remember to give positive feedback, and use it to find out more: "That's really interesting, can you tell me some more about ..."

- Be aware of the narrator's pace and allow them to complete their story without interruption

- Don't be worried by silences or pauses - your narrator may be gathering their thoughts. But if the silence is because they are getting upset or are uncomfortable with the question, steer them to a safer question

- Watch the narrator's non-verbal behaviour - are they getting tired or bored?

- Don't ask questions which have already been answered, or imply you already know the answer. The narrator will think you are bored, or not interested in their answers

- Sometimes narrators will reconstruct conversations: "The boss said, 'you're sacked,' and I said ...". Encourage such reconstruction, it can be revealing

- Be adaptable. Asking open-ended questions allows the narrator to talk about what is important to them, but occasionally some may want more focused questions, particularly at the beginning. Sometimes you may need to provide some context to a particular question, so that the narrator understands why you're asking it

After the interview

In many of Panos' projects, interviewers are members of the communities where the testimonies are collected. But if you are not from the area, don't just vanish after the interview - it causes annoyance and alienation and leads to a view of researchers as "thieves". Send letters of appreciation if appropriate, and when it comes to follow-up activities, make sure everyone is informed and as involved as they wish to be.

If you have audio-visual records, photos, tapes etc - share them. Provide copies of the tapes if requested (and within your budget) and of any resulting publications etc. A book is an artefact, it's tangible. A number of our partners working with groups with low levels of literacy agreed that it did not matter if some could not read the publication or booklet - they could hold it and say "this is about us", and know there had been a tangible outcome from their words. And it often proved an excellent way to generate more comment and reflection. But obviously you should tailor any outputs based on the testimonies to the communities' needs, and produce audio outputs if that is most appropriate. And if you are producing a booklet, involve the community as much as possible in the selection of testimonies and format (see Chapter 8, p69).

Storing and documenting the tapes
Don't ignore this aspect, it is vital for later use. Use new tapes for each interview. When you have finished, break the safety tabs on the tapes, so they cannot be recorded over. Label the cassette, noting: name of narrator, age, sex, occupation, date and place of recording and name of interviewer. Give each interview a number, and mark cassettes, summaries etc with this number.

Ideally, as soon as you can, listen to the tape right through. This provides an opportunity to make a back-up copy if finances permit (it is a good idea to protect the master tape by transcribing from a copy, but only vital if a project aim is to establish an archive). More importantly, if you haven't already done it, this will help you write the interview review, indicating what's on the tape, date and place, the narrator's details, the main topics, with ideally a brief sense of the flavour of the interview and how successful it was. Once the interview has been transcribed on to paper (see Chapter 7), you could then add a more detailed breakdown of the contents, using page numbers (or tape counters) as reference (see the *Sample summary*, p59).

The summary details are very useful for getting a quick overview of the whole collection, assessing the range of age, gender, occupation, experience etc, and the more detailed notes help greatly when making an initial selection of the most interesting interviews, or

of those which focus on certain topics, or to remind yourself of themes and content without having to read right through each testimony. It must be said that writing these summaries takes time, and some groups may prefer to stick to less detailed ones. However, the more you read the testimonies, the more you gain in understanding. First impressions become modified, new layers of meaning emerge or accumulate, and connections or contradictions between and within testimonies become more evident.

Of course, every project is different, and may develop different ways of sorting and summarising the tapes' content because there are particular issues they wish to highlight. But if you don't get down the basic information you need correctly and in an accessible format, a lot of time will be wasted later, sorting through piles of tapes or transcripts, trying to remember what is what. Disorganisation at this stage will compromise your ability later to make the best use of this wealth of unique information.

Keep tapes in a dry place, and as cool and dust-free as possible. Never store in direct sunlight or next to a source of heat. Avoid touching the tape with your fingers.

Summaries

The important thing to remember about summaries is that their primary purpose is to make the interview accessible to those who are going to use the material. Thus the things you choose to highlight, and the degree of detail you go into, should reflect individual project needs. A good basic format is to repeat the basic biographical detail, the interview number etc and follow this with several paragraphs which give a sense of the content and the flavour of the interview. Then, working from a master hard copy and using page numbers (or tape counters), note the main topics, and any highlights or particularly interesting passages or quotes.

Panos has often been working with a number of collections from different countries exploring the same subject (eg development-induced resettlement, or the impact of conflict on women) and one aim has been to produce information outputs based on these international collections. Thus it has been helpful to do quite detailed summaries. The different collections may have been gathered over several years, and although there is no substitute for repeated reading, when you have over 350 testimonies, having summaries to remind yourself of content, and to locate key passages, is a great help.

The best summaries are those which, once read, quickly bring to mind the character, and any strengths and weaknesses of the interview, and from which you can easily locate mention of particular topics, or important or interesting passages. Less successful

ones exhibit two failings: they tend to go into too much detail about the content, exhaustively noting every reference and subject covered, even if that mention is too brief or passing to be of great value, and/or they fail to get into the spirit of the interview and pick up interesting aspects or nuances. Of course, some interviews are less successful than others, and summaries should indicate any limitations of technique or content as well.

Overleaf is a sample page of a summary from a previous Panos project.

Sample summary

NAME: Urbano Huarcaya Peralta
AGE: 80
SEX: Male
OCCUPATION: *Comunero*
LOCATION: San Antonio de Yauli

At 80 years old, Urbano has an impressive lineage. His grandparents were among the founders of Yauli and his family have been *comuneros* (titled members of the community) ever since. Like many of the elder members of these communities, he recognises the changes as a result of the mines in terms of social values, livelihoods, customs, reduced support for health care, etc. In the early days, he was a porter for the mines, transporting the minerals by llama - nowadays it's all by road. He also worked in the mines, on contracts, for 20 years.

He talks of the history of the mines: the founding of the Volcan mining company and of the smelting works at La Oroya which forced all the smaller mining operations to close and obliged people to move to the bigger town. He describes the polluted rivers, the effects on the livestock and the community's mostly thwarted attempts to get any real compensation from the Ministry of Agriculture.

He remembers the days of the Cerro de Pasco Corporation and how miners have always had a better deal than *comuneros*. But he talks proudly of his time as a community leader and how he bought community lands off the Corporation and established a cooperative to raise cattle and pigs. But even this is failing them now because of the lack of resources, people's indifference, and the damage caused by the noxious fumes. He urges the younger members of the community to protest and claim what is rightfully theirs - but he is doubtful of their willingness to put the community first.

Many of Urbano's answers are quite short (which may be a reflection of his considerable age), and the interviewer sometimes seems to labour a point – nevertheless, it's a very human interview.

p1   Family history

p2   The animals he inherited from his parents have almost all perished from pollution-related illness
Disappearing customs and solidarity - changing priorities of young people (pay more attention to unions than religion)

p3   Still an active *comunero;* history of community: land titles lost during war with Chile - Yauli re-recognised in 1933; compensation for the polluted lands is a pittance and once shared among the *comuneros* hardly worth a thing

p4   Description of livestock illness (lead poisoning). Compensation agreements date back to 1925; says Cerro de Pasco Corporation (CDPC) benefited the community more than Centromin

p5   Llamas were used to transport minerals then came the rail roads and now heavy lorries

…summary continues….

Interview Checklist

Before interview
- arrange suitable time and location, allowing plenty of time to get there
- make sure the equipment is working

Take to interview
- recording equipment
- batteries and/or extension lead
- spare cassettes
- list of topics / questions
- any photographs or other memory triggers which you may have
- pen and notepad
- camera (if appropriate)

On arrival
- relax, explain aims / process / outcomes
- choose appropriate room (quiet) - if possible
- set up equipment and seating

While taping
- tape verbal consent to taping (optional)
- check recording levels after about 5 minutes
- on notepad write - proper names / places / dates
  - any non-verbal gestures
  - any other observations
- keep an eye on time / tape counter as you go

After taping
- discuss written permission (if appropriate)
- check spellings of proper names etc in notepad
- check narrator knows what happens next
- relax and spend time with narrator if appropriate

As soon as possible
- label tapes and cassette boxes
- knock out safety tabs
- make back-up copies of tape (if possible)
- send letter of thanks to narrator (or copy of tape)
- write review/first impressions of interview
- transcribe tape and write summary (if appropriate)

Chapter 6: Checking Progress

- **Midway review meeting**
- **Reviewing the interviews**
- **Interview content**
- **Interview technique**

Midway review meeting

It is well worth building in, if logistics allow, a review stage half-way through the actual testimony collection/fieldwork. This can play an important part in your monitoring and evaluation of the project (see Chapter 9), and the review will provide an opportunity to:

- assess progress in terms of interviews completed, transcribed etc

- give interviewers another chance to share experiences, any problems, and to gain feedback and perhaps more confidence

- see whether adjustments need to be made to ensure that the range of subjects covered, and the narrator "profiles", are as comprehensive as intended

- perhaps select any testimonies which merit a follow-up session, either because the narrator clearly has much more to relate, or because the first attempt missed important opportunities

- assess whether any interviewers are proving especially gifted - or ill-suited - to the task. You might wish to reduce the number of interviews for anyone clearly finding it hard, and give them to someone doing well and willing to take on a few more

- see whether the full range of topics is being covered over the interviews and assess whether this is because some topics have turned out not to be relevant, or because interviewers are having difficulty exploring certain topics with narrators

Reviewing the interviews

The following page contains suggestions for points to consider while checking the quality of interviews collected in a workshop practice session, or from the first batch of interviews collected in the field. It may also be useful to refer to the box - *Types of questions*, Chapter 4, pp 45-46, when reviewing the interviews.

Interview Content

- To what extent does the interview cover the subjects or topics discussed/anticipated?

- Have new themes/areas of interest emerged from the interview?

- Are there any good stories/anecdotes/jokes/proverbs within the interview?

- What did you learn from the interview that you didn't know?

- What value might this have?

- Did any information give you greater understanding of an issue or practice?

- Was there enough detail to be useful?

- Is a follow-up interview needed?

Interview Technique

- Are there leading questions (does the question suggest the answer)?

- Is more than one point/query raised by the same question?

- Are there too many questions which get the answer "yes"/"no"/"I don't know"?

- Does the interviewer have to repeat any questions in a different way? If so, why?

- Are some questions too vague to understand?

- Are some questions too complicated/difficult to understand?

- Are there good follow-up/probing questions?

- Does the interviewer ask enough follow-up questions?

- Does the interview appear to be influenced/interrupted by
     a) the interviewer
     b) onlookers

- Does the interviewer allow the narrator to speak on a different subject to the question? Was this productive/helpful?

- Does the interview flow well or does it jump confusingly from one subject to another?

- Does the interviewer allow enough time for the narrator to answer fully?

- Does the interviewer show interest in the answers?

- Does the narrator appear to be enjoying the interview

Chapter 7: Transcription and Translation

- **Transcription**
- **Translation**

Whether or not an interview is likely to be used in its original language, for example for a community history or education project, it should be transcribed from the tape in that language, and any translations prepared subsequently from that written text.

Sometimes it may be decided that the interviewer can translate from the tape directly into another main language, for example when the language of interview is one for which there is no written form. If transcription has to be into another language, the original tape should always be kept, so that at any later stage, direct transcription will still be possible. In a couple of projects where this occurred, Panos found keeping the original-language tape was also vital because some interviewers were not entirely confident in the language of transcription. A more fluent speaker was then able to work with the interviewer, double-checking the tape against the translation and correcting it where necessary.

Transcription

Transcription is a lengthy process: it takes from 5 to 10 hours to transcribe one hour of recorded speech. Despite this, do not be tempted to cut corners. Transcription should be as accurate (word-for-word) as possible - a summary of what was said will not be acceptable, as it will lose its colour, individuality and "oral" character, and can easily distort or misrepresent the speaker's real meaning. Always include the questions as well as the answers. This means it will be obvious where leading questions have been used, for example, and this might throw a different perspective on the narrator's reply.

If time permits, listen to the tape at least once before tackling transcription, and read the summary details and any notes or review of the interview you made at the time. It will remind you of the content and the flavour of the interview, and the narrator's main concerns. People don't always talk in a structured and logical order, and having a sense of the overall interview may help you to make sense of some comments etc which may seem puzzling or out of context, but which are in fact linked to earlier or later passages in the interview.

If at all possible, transcribe using a word processor rather than typewriter. Put the interview number and the basic biographical details at the beginning, so that if the text ever gets separated from a summary sheet, that information is still easily established.

Start with Tape 1, SIDE A, and make sure the tape counter on your machine is at 000. Then put the tape counter number at the top of every page (eg 088), or even more frequently (for example, at a change of topic or an especially significant section). Indicate when you change sides and tapes. Doing this now will save lots of time later if you or anyone else wants to locate particular sections on the tape, as you simply wind the tape back until you find that number on the tape counter.

It is good to introduce an interview with a couple of sentences which set the scene. Note down any observations which you feel are important for anyone reading the interview. This should precede the actual interview and be in italics (see **Sample page** on p67).

Ideally all transcribers in a project should follow the same style. A common approach is to put questions in bold, and put an extra line between each question and answer. Some indent the narrator's text for extra clarification. Some like to indicate the speakers with Q and A (but the narrator could ask a question); others use I and R or N (Interviewer and Respondent or Narrator); still others use the speakers' initials. If you follow the bold and indented style, it may not be necessary to use anything, unless there is more than one narrator, in which case initials should be used at the beginning of each bit of speech.

As far as possible, the transcriber should try to reflect the narrator's style and rhythm of speech, and can use dashes, dots and commas to do this. Single dashes indicate pauses within sentences. Three dots indicate where a sentence or phrase is left unfinished. Comments by the interviewer/transcriber which indicate emotions or actions should be in round brackets, eg (laughs) or (shows photograph). Where the interviewer/transcriber is adding information for clarification, square brackets should be used eg "It was the time of that festival I mentioned earlier [Holi] and we went to the city [Veranasi]."

Metaphors, proverbs and other words or phrases which are not easily understood, should be written down literally first. Where necessary, an explanation of the meaning can be added in brackets. The same approach should also be used when translating such phrases: literal meaning first; explanation in brackets. Also where a locally specific word doesn't have an exact equivalent, it is sufficient to explain it literally once (in brackets), and thereafter use the local word. Explanations of local references and any other relevant descriptions of the context of the interview should be attached to the text and sent with it to your local project coordinator.

Translation

One of Panos' partners, the Kenyan Oral Literature Association, gathers and publishes material in a number of different languages. They distinguish between three kinds of translation:

- literal - word for word
- direct translation - sense for sense - where the translation is more idiomatic than purely literal
- paraphrase - core of the meaning only

The second kind (sense for sense) requires skill and sensitivity, but can yield a text which does most justice to the original. Paraphrasing the meaning is NOT acceptable, since the aim of oral testimony projects is to present material which is as close to the narrator's original words as possible. If a translator starts to paraphrase or summarise, it is all too easy to lose important shades of meaning. For example, the translator may leave out things which seem unimportant to him/her, but might be highly significant to the narrator.

Panos and its partners have often found that project budgets have not been able to run to the cost of the most skilled translators. So we have usually had to go for the first, more literal approach to translation, and have emphasised the need for accuracy above all. A skilled editor can often take the awkwardness out of a translation, but they cannot put back accuracy if the text has been paraphrased, edited or cut. Indeed, a less polished version may be truer to the spirit of the original. If a translator decides to cut corners, and puts down what *they* think the narrator must have meant, there is a real danger of misrepresentation.

It is much better that wherever there is ambiguity or confusion, the translator makes that clear (putting their comment in brackets). They should not be afraid to indicate where rendering the meaning was difficult or likely to be inadequate. The tape, the transcript, and the translation (albeit to a lesser extent) all stand as master versions against which any other use of the testimonies can, if necessary, be checked - for example, to ensure that a quote used out of context does reflect its original meaning. For more on the difficult business of translation, read "The trials of translation" in *Listening for a Change*. Ultimately, it is important to be realistic, and honest, about the inevitable degree of filtering through others that a narrator's account is likely to undergo - from interviewer to transcriber to translator - and to do your best to keep this to a minimum.

A sample page from a transcribed and translated testimony follows. This sample page was chosen at random and there was some difficulty with the translation of the interview, as is noted. This sample page does however provide a good example of how a transcribed interview could look.

Sample page from a transcribed and translated testimony

Name: Amador Pérez Mandujano
Sex: Male
Age: 51
Occupation: Carpenter/owns small business
Location: La Oroya

Today, we are with Don Amador Pérez Mandujano. Don Amador is originally from La Oroya, where he still lives. He knows a lot about the history of Oroya, but especially about the daily life of this community, that has suffered a lot because of the fumes from the foundry. We are now going to chat with Don Amador.
[Translator's note: He uses many Quecha words in his Spanish, sometimes making it particularly difficult to give English equivalents and keep flavour of the original. He often talked in the present tense when speaking of the past.]

Side A 000
I: Could you tell us something about your family history? Are your parents and grandparents from la Oroya?
R: Yes, Senor, it is an honour for me to be able to communicate with you about different aspects of life in Oroya: some are good and others are not so good, like the fumes and *relaves* (waste/tailings). For me it has been a painful experience because of the changes in the area, starting in the time of my grandparents, because of the situation created by the company.

I: Where do your grandparents come from?
R: My grandparents are from La Oroya. They are real *oyorinos*, from San Jerónimo of Oroya, a *campesino* community of this area La Oroya. My parents are from Huyanacanchas, they are of Tarma by origin. But they have lived most of their life in La Oroya.

Truly, they have suffered a lot in their lives because of the mining company, the former Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation, because of the fumes. And those are real stories, not invented ones. These are stories that are real and palpable. According to the stories of my ancestors, my elders told me and have experienced this from 1944 until today. When the former Cerro de Pasco began to operate with its chimneys and its fumes in the region of Yauli-La Oroya, it was a way of not respecting people's dignity, because the *oroyinos* of San Jerónimo used to work with livestock and some with agriculture. In those times of the year 1949 - I cannot testify an exact date - even the potatoes that were planted were practically destroyed [by the pollution] and nothing could be harvested. Most of the highland animals began to die from an unknown disease, according to the story of my grandparents. All of this changed their lives. So my parents, in 1919 or 1920, with more experience and at the age of approximately 18 to 20, told us that the fumes were something bad that affected the residents themselves, and that the situation was critical. As you can tell, the situation did not allow you to have a good experience.

I: And your father, what did he work in? Did he work for the foundry, and in the construction of the foundry?
R: No, no, he did not work in that. He thought that if you went to the Company it was as if you were serving the enemy. Maybe it was an exaggeration, but he thought of it that way. But sincerely it is not like that. The development of our nation was due also to mining,

Chapter 8: Working with Testimonies

- **Information outputs and activities**
- **Points to consider first**
- **Additional considerations**

Information outputs and activities

In Chapter 2, p10, it was suggested that you should think about the outputs and activities you wish to base around the testimonies right from the planning stage. To determine these, you should consult the communities concerned and other participants in the project, including any linked organisations. Ideas to consider include:

- Local language publications
- National language publications
- Public exhibition using quotes from the testimonies
- Public meeting at which project participants present findings from the testimonies and debate these with the wider community
- A publications launch at which parts of the testimonies are dramatised
- Narrators interviewed on local and national radio
- Radio programmes with readings from the testimonies, followed by studio discussion
- Extracts featured in national press
- Meetings with local officials with testimonies presented as evidence for changing or improving policies
- Educational/literacy materials prepared using testimonies

Points to consider first

When considering how you will disseminate or otherwise use the testimonies, there are four linked points of which to take account:

1. **the audience** – who you want to reach
2. **the aim** – what are you trying to communicate
3. **the medium** – how you want to communicate the material
4. **the emphasis** – is it on the actual testimonies? or on analysis of and comment on the testimonies?

1. The audience

There are usually two potential audiences:

- "insiders" - for example, the community and interviewers which generated the testimonies in the first place, and in whose interests they have been collected

- "outsiders" - the wider audience whom you wish to inform and influence, both directly (through meetings, mailings etc), and indirectly (through, for example, the media)

This second, wider audience could simply be the general public, but in the context of Panos projects, it is also likely to include a more specialist one, such as development practitioners, policymakers, donors and/or researchers. Within that broad group of people, you might need to identify those concerned with the particular topic or aspect on which you have been working, eg gender, conflict, biodiversity, resettlement.

The two audiences do not necessarily require separate outputs. Panos' partners in Uganda in the "women and conflict" project (see Chapter 1, p5) produced a booklet in the local language of Luo which was of great personal significance and value to the narrators, representing an important and rare chance to share their stories. But the booklet also became a powerful tool for advocacy work by People's Voice for Peace, the community-based organisation which was subsequently founded by the interviewers and narrators in order to continue the work of the original project. They read from the booklet in their meetings and gave copies to government officials, the media, and the local and international agencies whom they were trying to illuminate on the reality of their experiences and current situation. The haunting stories of courage and survival stimulated coverage on local radio, and in the local and national press.

2. The aim

It is important to establish what you want your audience to learn or gain from the material. Unless you are reproducing word-for-word, uncut interviews, this will influence any selection and editing decisions you make. Be honest – and transparent – about your aims and intentions. Otherwise, your audience (and even you) may not realise the extent to which any selection you make is presenting a particular aspect of the material – reflecting your own interests, for example – rather than the whole range of concerns contained in the interviews. Whether your primary purpose is education, documentation or entertainment may also influence the way you present the material and perhaps the medium you choose.

3. The medium

The majority of Panos' partners have chosen print or audio, or both as the means of disseminating the testimonies. Outputs have ranged from professionally made radio programmes to simply produced cassettes for community-level distribution and discussion, and from low-cost photocopied booklets to more substantial publishing ventures. Drama can also be an effective means of communicating testimony.

If resources are sufficient, you could consider producing a CD Rom. (Later versions of this manual may contain some guidelines on this.) Making a video is another possibility. Panos and its partners have not used video as a means of recording oral testimony and so it is not covered in this manual - there are some aspects to working with video that mean you cannot simply substitute a video recorder for a tape recorder to do the kind of interviews we are suggesting. The use of video in this context brings different strengths and limitations, and projects would have to be conceived and designed accordingly. There are grassroots organisations which specialise in community video work, and who are skilled in teaching how to run participatory projects.

4. The emphasis

Many publications or other forms of dissemination of oral testimonies tend to emphasise the voices of the narrators. In a book this would mean the bulk of the text was the testimonies, or selections thereof. A more academic approach would result in the greater proportion of the text being the writer/researcher's analysis and interpretation of the material, with quotes from the testimonies introduced to illustrate the argument. But these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, certainly not within a project – and not with certain forms of dissemination. A CD-Rom, for example, could be designed to allow the audience to move between different kinds of information – from the testimonies themselves, to background information, to relevant analysis or research.

Panos, being primarily an information and communication organisation, has concentrated on getting people's voices out to a wider audience, although we have also produced articles and given presentations where the testimonies have formed the basis for analysis and discussion. Two examples of information outputs produced by Panos are described in the box *International Links* (p74).

If your emphasis is on the testimonies (and for most of Panos' partners, this was the case), and taking a booklet as an example, there are various options for presentation.
(a) By narrator:
- All the testimonies, narrator by narrator, with questions, uncut
- All the testimonies, narrator by narrator, minus questions but otherwise uncut
- All the testimonies, narrator by narrator, with repetition etc cut from the text
- Selections from the testimonies. This involves more substantial editing, whereby you select what seems to you and other participants to be the most interesting, eloquent, powerful or representative sections (again, with or without questions). These extracts may vary from short quotes to much longer sections

(b) By theme:

- Selections from the testimonies, but presented thematically, rather than narrator by narrator. Thus you would have extracts from different narrators under subject headings, for example: a series of extended quotes from different interviewers on drought, desertification, migration, or marriage patterns. Thus readers would get a sense of the many and varied opinions which people held on key themes and issues, as well as the range of experience within the collection. Using this format you might sacrifice some of the human detail and sense of personality which can accumulate by following individual narrators' stories, but you gain a useful overview of the collection.

Thus there are advantages to both kinds of presentation. Even if you go for the narrator by narrator approach, you can use sub-headings to indicate different themes as they come up in the text. And if your main audience is the community - the narrators, interviewers, their friends and families - then they might well prefer to have their interviews presented this way, rather than split up under different headings. If they see this first publication more as a documentary record of their community and their views at that time - something to pass on to their children and grandchildren - then full testimonies may be their preference.

If you decide to present the testimonies by theme, you are going to need to put in more time, deciding on the themes and choosing the selected texts, but you may end up with a more coherent and accessible publication, which will appeal to those both within and outside the community.

Obviously the least time-consuming approach is simply to present unedited testimonies, narrator by narrator, but this could end up being quite a large and bulky publication, and while the individual narrators may like this, it might prove rather overwhelming to other readers. Also, some narrators may appreciate having some of their testimony cut, for example where perhaps they felt less certain about the subject being talked about, and/or there were lots of one-line questions and answers, or where they had rambled or lost the thread of the conversation. They may actively prefer to have published only those parts where they felt more confident about their views or had especially interesting experiences or opinions to relate. The best thing is to discuss these ideas with all concerned, and see which format they would prefer.

Additional considerations

Editing the testimonies

Where "editing" is mentioned here, we do not mean re-writing or paraphrasing the narrators' original words. While the aim is to make the meaning of the words as clear as possible to the reader and/or listener, it is also on the basis that one should remain as true to the original as possible, and that this original was the spoken - not written - word. Where Panos has published selections from the testimonies, we have edited lightly - mainly to remove repetition or confusion and, in many cases, the interviewers' questions. We also sometimes moved text to ease understanding. For example, where someone returned to a topic later in the conversation, we might put the relevant paragraphs together.

- Sometimes, losing the preceding question or text has meant we had to insert some additional text for clarification, which we indicate with square brackets. For example: *They didn't want [the refugees] to settle here.*

- Translation, interpretation or explanation of, for example, a locally specific word, saying or proverb, should be in round brackets, following the original. This may not be necessary in your publication, but is worth doing whenever you cannot assume your audience is familiar with such words. For example: *The patwari (village head) told them to leave.*

In every case, the aim is clarification. Whatever degree of selection and editing you decide to adopt, it is worth being transparent about it (perhaps outlining the process in an introductory paragraph to the booklet).

Illustrations

Simple photocopied prints, line drawings, even hand-drawn maps, can all significantly enliven a publication without adding a lot to production costs.

Drama

With enthusiasm and a certain amount of skill, oral testimonies can be presented through drama, making compelling material which lends itself to participation and discussion. Depending on the focus of the collection and the culture within which it is gathered, there may already be a store of songs and stories embedded in the interviews.

Using the media

You may be able to interest a national or local paper in featuring excerpts from the testimonies, and perhaps inviting readers to send in comments and contributions. Local

or national radio may be interested in making a programme around the project, or interviewing participants. Your own material may stimulate them to make a programme on the topic, using some of the testimonies but also gathering their own interviews from other groups of the same topic. If there is a community media or rural information/media organisation with whom you can be in touch, ask them for advice and ideas. Ideally, get in touch with them in the early stages of formulating your project, if you want their involvement in the dissemination of the testimonies.

Audio cassettes

You may wish to put together a tape which contains excerpts from the testimonies, read by the narrators themselves or by a select group who can voice them in ways which would be acceptable to the narrators. This can then be copied at low cost for wide distribution, and could prove to be a useful community discussion tool. You could produce several tapes on different themes, for example, the environment, the impact of increased migration, development priorities; or for different groups, such as the elderly, women, the disabled, the unemployed, veterans of war etc. It will be important to ensure you cover the range of response and experience the testimonies highlighted, however conflicting and contradictory these may sometimes be.

Further uses

Much oral testimony is relatively timeless. If the project coordinator and other appointed individuals ensure that the archive is well kept - and that access to it is carefully monitored in order to avoid any potential misuse - the testimonies may continue to provide powerful source material for a number of possible audiences/objectives. Selections can be used to enliven and add relevance and interest to community literacy and health education materials, training packs and workshops, adult and development education programmes, schools curriculum. If at some stage, the original group or NGO dissolves, contact a related organisation or documentation centre to see if they would like to keep the archive.

Process as well as product

Other Panos partners have gone to collect more testimonies using the methodology, sometimes adding to the original collection, but also taking up different themes, or the perspective of a different sector of society. Several have linked up with other groups and passed on their experience of the methodology itself and the training workshop. The existence of these guidelines may make this easier.

International links

If (as Panos partners usually are) you are part of a wider, global project linking testimony collections on the same theme(s) but in different countries and circumstances, another way in which your testimonies might be communicated is internationally, in translation, and alongside the testimonies from other countries. For many participating groups, this sense of being part of a wider community with shared concerns supported and informed them in their own efforts to communicate their views. They appreciated the opportunity to network and exchange experiences, but also felt the presentation of their viewpoint was stronger for being global.

Two examples of Panos' international outputs are *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: women speak out about conflict* (Panos, London, 1995), and a radio docudrama *Women and War* (Panos, 1996). The radio programme consisted entirely of extracts from women's testimony on four themes, and had no narration, although the cassettes were sent out with detailed background information and suggestions for ways to build on the material (scripts were included). One pack was written specially for broadcasters, and encouraged them – successfully – to follow the docudrama with their own programme on the subject, bringing in women from the region/locality. Another pack was written for those involved in post-conflict work in the field, and contained suggestions for building discussion groups and other awareness-raising activities around the tape's contents.

The book also consisted primarily of selections from the testimonies. There was an introductory chapter which highlighted the themes and issues which emerged from testimonies; a brief description of the project and the methodology, including the editing process; maps and background information on the conflicts and countries; and an index and a glossary. The rest of the book was the women's words.

Chapter 9: Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Why do monitoring and evaluation?**
- **What is monitoring and evaluation?**
- **How to do monitoring and evaluation**

Why do monitoring and evaluation?

- Monitoring and evaluation (M+E) is an important part of any project. It is not about looking back and finding fault. It is about looking forward in terms of learning lessons, and thinking about how things might be improved. Integrating M+E into your project design from the beginning should enhance its efficiency and effectiveness, as well as increase the potential for learning from the activity.

- Anyone involved in a project is more likely to stay motivated and committed if they are aware of what is being achieved by their efforts. Since testimony collection projects often include rather intangible objectives, such as awareness raising and "empowerment", it can be especially worthwhile to find ways to assess and demonstrate their impact.

- Even if your organisation is not planning more oral testimony collection, building in some M+E may well raise useful issues and findings. Most development projects are continually searching for ways to improve their work, and the information generated through M+E of oral testimony collection may well provoke helpful reflection and ideas.

- If you have had outside funding for your work, M+E will provide some data to illustrate the activities which have been undertaken, and to support your case for adopting a particular approach or methodology. Donors often request evidence that their funds have been spent productively, and many are nervous of supporting qualitative information activities which cannot be easily "proved" to have met pre-determined and measurable targets. Without abandoning the case for this kind of qualitative work, it can help the argument for such projects if evidence can be gathered which helps to inform and educate everyone of how it has worked (or not), and what has been achieved (or not) – and why.

What is monitoring and evaluation?

The terms monitoring and evaluation are often used together in development without distinguishing between them. Clearly, the two are linked; it would be hard to evaluate a project effectively if you had not monitored certain aspects or activities over the course of the work. Take, for example, a project which aimed to raise the awareness of local NGOs about a certain issue. The monitoring should have identified, among other things, the number of NGOs which attended a workshop and/or received the information generated by the project etc, while the evaluation could involve interviewing individuals and groups about their reaction to/use of this information. If those involved had also been surveyed at the beginning of the project, to assess their awareness of the issue at that time, you would then have some data with which to judge the extent to which your objective had been met. Thus the two processes complement each other. Nevertheless, the list below outlines some helpful distinctions which may help you plan your M+E activities.

Monitoring	Evaluation
• Part of project management, and takes place at different stages throughout the project's duration eg the mid-term review	• Part of the final assessment of the project, examining the extent aims and objectives have been met
• May be mostly done by project coordinator	• Requires feedback from a range of people involved in the project
• Tends to be more factual and focused on tangible objectives, for example, the number of testimonies gathered etc	• Needs to be participatory because it involves people's subjective opinions and perspectives

How to do monitoring and evaluation

What you monitor and evaluate will obviously reflect the specific aims and objectives of your particular project (see Chapter 2). The clearer a project's aims and objectives, the easier they will be to monitor and evaluate. Thinking about M+E at this first stage may even help clarify the ambitions of the project. In brief, though, evaluation of an oral testimony project should explore both the **processes** used and the **products** which result. Thus you might wish to build in M+E at the following different stages:

• Project design and planning
• Training (including the workshop)

- Testimony collection (using the midway review)
- Transcribing/translating/summarising/storing the testimonies
- The quality of the testimonies themselves
- Dissemination: again, process (eg getting media coverage) and products (eg booklets, an exhibition)

    locally

    regionally

    nationally

    internationally
- Overall impact of the project

The midway review meeting (see Chapter 6, p61) can be a crucial stage in project M+E. It is an opportunity not only to monitor progress, but also a chance for interviewers to discuss and reflect upon the testimony collection process, and for any necessary adjustments to be made.

Quantitative Targets and Indicators

In designing your project, it will help to include some quantitative targets. Monitoring these is part of general project management. Here are some examples:

- Number and profile (age, gender, occupation) of interviewers trained
- Number and profile (age, gender, occupation etc) of narrators interviewed
- Number of testimonies

    recorded

    transcribed

    summarised

    indexed (if appropriate)

    translated (if appropriate)
- Take-up of local language publications, if appropriate (ie requests for copies after initial distribution)
- Number of items in the media, local and national, based on testimonies, if appropriate
- Number of visitors to exhibition, if appropriate

Methods for Monitoring

- Questionnaires
- Keeping good records

Questionnaires and evaluation forms are good for workshops etc. And in certain circumstances the anonymity of questionnaires can free people to be more open and critical than they would otherwise. The problem with questionnaires is, that if they are sent out with publications for example, with no follow-up, you can end up waiting ages for a few returns. Face to face contact is generally more immediate and productive. Given their limitations, here are some ideas for where you might find questionnaires helpful (but try to back these up with brief interviews):

- For feedback on the workshop from interviewers and other participants
- For feedback on both process and product from (a) interviewers; (b) some narrators (only those willing to be bothered again); (c) any partner organisations; (d) any project consultant or specialist reader
- For feedback from a sample number of recipients of the local publications and any other local information outputs, such as radio programmes

Remember – one of the reasons for doing an oral testimony collection is the recognition that predetermined questions provide only partial pictures of people's opinions and experiences. So use the same principles in learning about your project. Meetings and less formal discussions are an excellent and simple way of obtaining feedback.

Qualitative Aims and Objectives

Consultation with those involved in the project is the key to measuring qualitative objectives. It is virtually impossible to "measure" an objective such as "to empower participating communities to set their own agenda for social change and development" without participatory discussion and reflection with those involved. As a guide, the following groups should be consulted to obtain their feedback and opinions on different aspects of the project:

- Interviewers
- Narrators
- Community representatives
- Staff from any partner organisation
- People/organisations which have received the various outputs of the project

Depending on your project, you may find addressing some of the following questions helpful in assessing the more qualitative aspects:

- To what extent did the initial topic list match the eventual summary (or index) of the themes of the testimonies collected?
- To what extent were the anticipated follow-up activities fulfilled?

- Has the project generated requests for project staff, narrators (and/or their testimonies) to contribute to conferences, publications and policy documents in the region?
- What has been the nature of local media coverage of project publications (reviews, extracts, editorials, interviews)?
- What success has there been at feeding the material into research, debate and public awareness of relevant issues at local and international levels?
- What has anecdotal feedback revealed, for example how did narrators feel about the project?

Evaluating Overall Impact

During the process of monitoring and evaluating, you will be getting an idea of the extent to which your project is succeeding in meeting its objectives. Nevertheless, there will come a time to bring all this information together and assess the overall impact (for example, when you have to report to a donor). Ideally, you will also follow this up at a later stage, in order to assess the longer term impact as well as more immediate results. Dissemination of publications, for example, may take time to show results.

Finally, general feedback in whatever form is important and valuable, and is worth recording. It may tell you about any **unexpected** and **unintended outcomes** of the project - negative or positive.

Sharing results

The findings and outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation should be shared with those involved directly in the project in order that everyone can benefit from the lessons learned. Developing a culture by which people naturally think about "**lessons learned**" at every stage of the project makes M+E a constructive and positive exercise, rather than one associated with criticism (and therefore often avoided).

The key to good M+E is that it is not only about reviewing what you have done and what you have achieved. Rather, it is using this process of review to develop the knowledge and means to improve this or future projects. M+E is a great learning device.