D2.1   Interview Methods

INTRODUCTION

Three question-based methods that can be applied for the investigation of the community's perspective on environmental sanitation issues are presented here. Depending on the objectives of the study, one of them can be selected or a combination can be made.

While **pocket voting** is a relatively simple technique for the rapid assessment of a group's priorities, **focus group discussions** and **individual interviews** require thorough preparation and professional facilitation. The moderator (facilitator) and interviewer need a lot of practice and skills.

With all methods, the attitudes, beliefs and expectations of the individuals and also those of the group should be taken into account. Furthermore, it is important to understand and utilize the social language, to understand the specific vocabulary[1] and to be aware of the sensitiveness of the context.

Combining focus group discussions with individual interviews helps to cross-check results and to explain possible contradictions. Moreover, a broader and deeper picture can be obtained.

While surveys repeatedly identify gaps between people's knowledge and their behaviour, only qualitative methods, such as focus group discussions and individual interviews, can actually fill these gaps and explain why they occur (Kitzinger 1995, Wellings et al. 2000).

POCKET VOTING

In a democratic way, participants anonymously vote and state their views on sensitive subjects predefined by a facilitator.

Purpose

Pocket voting is particularly useful for obtaining information on topics on which people feel embarrassed or inhibited to talk about in the public. It can be used to investigate the existing situation as well as to find out what sort of improvements and adjustments would be preferred by different groups of people (male, female, poor, rich, etc.). Aspects that can be identified by pocket voting include:

- Water sources and their use
- Defecation practices and use of toilet facilities
- Preferences for improvements and priority of sanitation

Procedure

The original form of the pocket voting technique is as follows: the facilitator presents a question to be answered anonymously by each group member. He

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[1] The best would be to let the community members explain the used terms themselves; this provides a deeper understanding of local concepts, correlations and interpretations

explains the possible answers (or options, scenarios), which are represented by pockets sewn into a cloth. The predefined answers can be visualised by pictures or drawings attached to the pockets. For the anonymous voting process, the cloth is hung in a concealed room and one by one the group members take the vote by placing a stone or token[2] in the respective pocket.

Alternatively, the participants can be provided with response cards where they anonymously mark or write their answers, as well as concerns and ideas regarding the questions asked by the facilitator. Thereafter, the cards are placed in a polling box. The range of answers could also be defined in a participatory manner with the group.

After the voting session, the facilitator displays the results to the group for an analysis and interpretation of the findings. The group's attention is drawn to voting patterns like similarities or differences. Through pocket voting, a good basis for further discussions on current services and practices and the need for modification is provided.

Advantages and disadvantages
+ reduces possible embarrassment
+ ensures confidentiality
+ reduces reservation and objection to tell the truth or to give an opinion
+ does not require much time for preparation, realisation and analysis
− limited information gain through predefined answers (may simplify the answering possibilities and influence how people think about the question and how they answer it)
− too many questions are not practical

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS
Purpose
Focus group discussions (FGDs) serve to elicit social/cultural norms, values and (behavioural) practices of the group, to address the broadness of the themes, disagreements, contradictions, norm violations and their consequences. The outputs of FGDs are knowledge on and perceptions of the group; the central point is the detection of socially (re-)produced group norms in the interactions of the group members. A close look should be taken at the differences between diverging groups, particularly in terms of gender, age, interests as well as participation and self-representation during the group discussion.

The focus group discussion method is useful to get an understanding of people's experiences and knowledge, and to find out what people think and why they think that way. FGD disclose conflicts between what is assumed to be private and personal (delicate and sensitive topics) and what is open and public and may therefore provide comprehension on topics which other methods would not be able to reveal. Essential with this method is the interaction between participants; group members should be enabled to focus on one another, rather than on the facilitator(s).

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[2] With tokens in two different colours a gender differentiation can be undertaken.

Data from focus groups should not simply be interpreted as being generated by a collection of individuals, but as socially produced in the group interactions. Individuals in a focus group might express their own opinions and describe their own behaviours, but they also adapt and censor these to make them acceptable to the perceived norm of the group or/and the researcher(s).

Advantages and disadvantages
+ does not discriminate against persons who are illiterate or, for other reasons, cannot write or read.
+ can encourage participation from persons who can not be interviewed (because of feeling humiliated by the setting of a face to face interview) or think they have nothing to say (those can get involved in a discussion initiated by other group members).
− A negative aspect of group dynamics is that the articulation of group norms could quieten individual voices with differing opinions and views.
− Another challenge is the social desirability, when participants answer and discuss the offered topics in favour of the researchers assumed expectations (Kitzinger 1995, Wellings et al. 2000).

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS
Purpose
Individual (or single, face to face, or in-depth) interviews elicit personal topics, practices, and individual norm violations that do not arise during FGDs. Individual interviews serve to deepen topics mentioned during FGDs and to cross-check or complement data.
The outputs of individual interviews are knowledge, perceptions, and practices of individuals.

Individual interviews are one of the standard methods for surveys. They might be semi-structured or entirely narrative using only open-ended questions. The less structured and the more in-depth an interview is, the more privacy and time is required, but the more details might be retrieved that would not have been brought up by a predetermined questionnaire.
Even though in-depth interviews require time and interviewing skills, they are useful once topics, taboos, wording and persons with access to relevant information regarding certain topics (key-informants) have been identified. It is important to choose people from different backgrounds, and not only one person per household, as the respective situation presents itself differently for each household member.

Advantages and disadvantages
+ generates in-depth knowledge
+ suitable for the investigation of personal topics and individual practices
− requires time and interviewing skills

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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