

Semi Structured Interview

What is it?

A form of guided interview in which only a few questions are decided upon ahead of time. This interviewing technique can be used both to give information (such as raising awareness about tuberculosis) and to receive information (such as finding out what people know about tuberculosis). Interviews can take the following forms:

Key informant interviews – with people who can provide specialized information which might not be known to the general community, for example the village nurse or doctor.

Individual interviews – One-on-one interviews are useful when the subject is sensitive or difficult to talk about in groups and also provide individual perspectives.

Group interviews – Used to gather information about the community from a large body of knowledge in a shorter time. However, care needs to be taken not to cause tension by raising sensitive issues in a group setting.

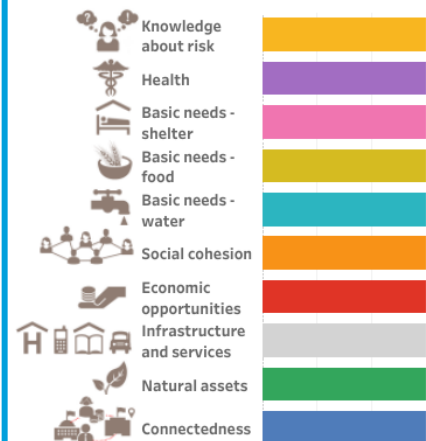


40-60 min (variable)



Paper for note-taking, audio/video recording device.

Resilience characteristics covered



Nicaraguan Red Cross Volunteer with community member.

Use it to...

- **Gain** a deeper understanding of the issue, values and attitudes based on the information shared by the respondent.
- **Collect** supplementary information for other tools, for example the historical profile can be elaborated with data collected through interviews.
- **Allow** for more flexibility in the questions asked than with a standard questionnaire. It is less one-sided, as interviewees are able to ask questions of the interviewer as well.
- **Discuss** sensitive issues when people are interviewed by themselves, particularly if the interviewer is not from the community. This tool also allows direct contact with potential beneficiaries.

How to do it:

Step 1. Decide who will do the semi-structured interviews

It is recommended to create a small team of interviewers, generally of two to four people from the team, they could be from the community or outside of the community. If possible, have women interview women and men interview men. It is advisable that interviewers have previous experience conducting interviews to make sure appropriate and relevant questions are asked, that the conversation is focused on the issue and that information is recorded.

Step 2. Decide who will be interviewed and how the interview will be done

When identifying who in the community would be valued 'key informants' ensure to reference your secondary data analysis and community profile, as well as observation of the community. The FGDs and implementation of other tools may also reveal issues that would require follow up with a key informant in the community. It is therefore suggested to leave time at the end in case discussion topics need to be further explored in depth.



Individuals who hold higher rankings in the community or who are in respected positions may come from a similar demographic and social group. Therefore, it is likely that you may miss certain informants across gender and social groups. It is important to interview a range of key informants such as police, health workers, fisherfolk, traders etc.



For example, these specific groups may know if anything 'unusual' is going on in relation to disaster events, agricultural production and health. Think about how women and men might be affected differently by different weather patterns and may have insight into changes in different ways. It is therefore important to consider including people from a diverse range of livelihoods and roles within the community in the semi-structured interviews.

Step 3. Decide on the topic and questions guide:

Prepare an interview guide and some questions in advance to ensure that all areas are covered. Consider the data that you need to collect in order to have a full picture of the community, use the [resilience characteristics](#) as a guide to find out about vulnerabilities and

capacities. Is there any information that you need to collect to triangulate with other tools? Are there any gaps in the information that you can address through interviews?

Before interacting with the respondents, interviewers can practice interviews with each other and/or with a few community members to test the questions, get familiar with the questions and receive feedback on their two-way communication skills.

TIP!

Try to avoid questions that lead to “yes” or “no” answers. Instead, use “open questions” which usually more effectively stimulate discussion and give a picture of what is affecting a community. For example, asking a community whether they know if the “climate is changing” might be unfamiliar to them. But asking them about their agricultural practices and traditional knowledge and how the present situation and patterns compares to the past might help reveal useful information about changes in seasons. It can also be useful to use other tools in conjunction with interview questions (such as observation and secondary data) to confirm or adjust the assumptions that you are making.



For more guidance on questions on the topics of gender and diversity and climate change see [here](#).

Step 4. Conduct the interview

Keep the interview informal and mix questions with discussion. Ask few targeted questions, which can not be collected in a different way to keep the interview short and focused.

Record the information! During the interview write only brief notes, to help build the interviewee’s trust. Elaborate on your notes immediately after the interview so that you do not forget key details. With consent, you could video- or audio-tape the interview, however, people may be reluctant to be recorded.



Philippine Red Cross volunteers with community member.

Step 5. Analyse the information

Analyse the interview results at the end of each day, either with the whole team or individually. Cluster similar answers into information about hazard and exposure or about vulnerability and capacity into the [resilience characteristics](#) (see tables below) and keep the distinction between what is said by women and men and other different groups (you could add columns for different groups).

Hazard	Level of exposure (elements)

Resilience characteristics	Vulnerabilities identified	Capacities identified
Knowledge about risk		
Health		
Basic needs – shelter		
Basic needs – food		
Basic needs – water		
Social cohesion		
Economic opportunities		
Infrastructure and services		
Natural assets		
Connectedness		

Step 6. Share and discuss the results

Discuss the analysis with community members so that they can challenge the perceptions of the interview team, making the process even more participatory.

Next steps

Use responses from interviews to inform planning for intervention and triangulate information with other tools. If you have recorded the interviews and the participant agrees, playing the recording back to the participants can be a way of sharing the information with community members.

Team meetings can help identify similarities in responses. The information may also be useful to external parties, such as government officials and NGOs.

Constraints and pitfalls

- Talking with people takes a fair amount of time. Make sure you allocate sufficient time.
- This method more than others can be heavily biased by the culture, gender and perspectives/background of the interviewer or the interviewee.
- Ensure that, in an individual interview, the interviewee understands and trusts that the responses will be confidential. If using a recording device, such as a tape recorder, mobile phone or video camera, be sure to ask the interviewee's permission.
- If the interview is being done in a group setting, people may interrupt one another, "help one another out" or not wait their turn. Or they may go off the topic completely. The interviewer will need good facilitation skills in order to manage the discussion and ensure that everyone has a chance to express themselves.
- A common failing among interviewers is to ask leading questions, i.e. questions phrased in such a way as to suggest the desired answer. Other problems that can arise are: failure to listen closely and record only the information that confirm biased assumptions; repeating questions; failure to probe when necessary; failure to judge the answers (i.e. fact, opinion or rumour) or generalising a personal opinion of few vocal individuals that do not represent the views/situations of a large share of the community; and asking vague or insensitive questions. These weaknesses can be improved with time and experience, by being self-critical, reflecting after each interview what went well, what could have been improved, what skills one needs to develop to get the respondents provide better answer to the questions or refocus gently the discussion...