Section 4
Research methods

This section first gives key features of the main research methods (Table 2) and then discusses a selection of these in greater-depth.

Table 3: An overview of main research methods

Method	Key Features
Sample Surveys	Collect quantitative data through questionnaires. Usually a random sample and a matched control group are used to measure pre-determined indicators before and after the intervention
Panel Surveys	Return one or more times to the same households or individuals, to create 'panels' of respondents who have been followed over time. This enables a much stronger assessment of change over time.
Focus Groups	Group discussions exploring people's attitudes and opinions towards a particular topic.
Interviews	These can be structured, open-ended or conversational.
Life History Interviews	Centre the interview around the respondent telling his/her own story. This can be focused on the whole life, a portion of the life, or specific aspects, depending on the purpose of the research, but the best results are often obtained from more open ended, interviewee-driven approaches.
Rapid Appraisal	A range of tools and techniques developed originally as rapid rural appraisal (RRA). Involves the use of focus groups, semi-structured interviews with key informants, case studies, participant observation and secondary sources. This is one form of participatory approach.
Participant Observation	Extended residence in a programme/project community by field researchers using qualitative techniques and mini-scale sample surveys
Case Studies	Detailed studies of a specific unit (a group, locality, organisation) involving open-ended questioning and the preparation of 'life histories'.
Participatory Learning and Action	The preparation by beneficiaries of a programme of timelines, impact flow charts, village and resource maps, well being and wealth ranking, seasonal diagrams, problem ranking and institutional assessments through group processes assisted by a facilitator.
Specialised methods	E.g. Photographic records and video.

4.1 Focus group discussions

Focus groups are an exploratory research tool - a 'structured group process' to explore people's thoughts and feelings and obtain detailed information about a particular topic or issue (Sherraden, 2001). Focus group discussions generally last from an hour and a half to two hours, longer than this and the discussion loses momentum (Sherraden, 2001). If the discussion is well managed, it allows deep-seated feelings on a subject to emerge naturally.

Groups are usually composed of seven or eight people, selected purposively, based on a set of criteria, plus a recorder, and led by a trained moderator. This size yields a variety of viewpoints and good participation. Groups can have a larger size range, e.g. four to 12 members, but smaller groups tend to be dominated by one or two people and larger groups inhibit the participation by some members (Sherraden, 2001).

The focus group moderator's job is to facilitate the discussion and to encourage all respondents to contribute their thoughts, feelings and ideas. The discussion is usually semi-structured using a checklist of issues constructed iteratively by the research team.

Focus groups are used widely by product marketing companies and in health related research. In development-related research, focus group discussions are often seen as being a participatory-type method. While they can be used alongside participatory methods, they can be used as a single self-contained method or alongside quantitative research.

Focus group discussions are useful early on in a study when the researcher wants to gain a rapid understanding of key themes or issues of controversy. Use focus groups when you are not sure of the exact questions you want to ask. They can be useful for:

- Generating qualitative data (insights into needs, expectations, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and feelings of participants)
- Broadening the research field – surprise issues may emerge
- Identifying key issues – for follow up later using other research methods
- Developing emergent themes
- Generating hypotheses for testing later in research
- Developing interview schedules (for key informants or sample surveys)
- Corroborating or triangulating findings generated earlier - by quantitative or qualitative methods (including individual sample questionnaires, structured or semi-structured interviews with key informants, and participative research tools)

- Providing clear and expressive vignettes to support quantitative findings
- Getting reflective feedback for impact assessments or on government policies or interventions

4.1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Advantages

- Relatively easy to undertake
- Efficient – including the views of a number of people at the same time
- Quick - results can often be obtained in a reasonably short time span.
- People often express views that they might not express in other settings, or if interviewed as individuals. Social interaction within the group can yield freer and more complex responses, when there is interactive synergy, spontaneity and security of participants within the group (Sherraden, 2001).
- Flexible - the researcher can probe for clarification or greater detail. Unanticipated lines of discussion can be pursued.
- Responses have high 'face validity' due to the clarity of the context and detail of the discussion.
- Work well a range of different populations, including people who may have limited education, modest verbal skills, and low self-esteem, and lack of prior experience expressing personal views.
- Low cost
- Require a moderate to low preparation time and a moderate time for analysis.

Disadvantages

- Moderator requires special skills - stimulating and managing a guided group discussion is not as easy as it sounds. The skill of the moderator can have a tremendous impact on the success of the group, i.e., whether discussion flows freely (Sherraden, 2001). 'Moderating focus groups is much like writing poetry: anyone can do it, but few do it really well' (Ellison Research, 2001).
- Groups can be difficult to assemble. It is difficult to persuade people to give up their time and to find a time suitable for all participants.
- The setting and conditions must be conducive to discussion - individuals must feel secure and confident within the group.
- Individual responses are not independent of one another and group dynamics can vary considerably.
- The evaluator has less control than in an individual interview.
- Data can be difficult to summarise and analyse. There is a lot of specific information, some of it very tangential to the topic (Sherraden, 2001).

- Conformity effects – the pressure in groups is to conform to the group norm and so important opinions may not be expressed.
- Participants are not randomly sampled so findings are not generalisable.

4.1.2 Undertaking focus groups

The goal is to obtain as much useful information as possible. Confidentiality helps. Group interaction can bring out additional information. The moderator stimulates the group discussion and keeps it on course, as necessary. S/he should not take a position on anything, but should listen. Every response is considered valid. There is no attempt to support or criticise any response, resolve any issue, address any individual problem or concern or reach any conclusion. Both concrete information and opinions are relevant (Sherraden, 2001). The moderator should not be concerned if the group is silent at any point. It may be the first time that participants have thought about the issue you are discussing.

Basic sequence of events:

1. Formulate the research question
2. Identify and train moderators
3. Generate, pre-test, and revise the interview guide
4. Develop the sampling frame
5. Decide what incentives to use to encourage people to attend. Choose one or more from: payment, food and drink, childcare, feedback on findings, a token gift, transport to and from the site
6. Recruit participants - use local contacts to identify people
7. Make necessary arrangements (setting, equipment, food and drinks, and childcare)
8. Schedule the groups – check that they are at an appropriate time for participants.0
9. Introduce everyone – give name badges if it is locally appropriate
10. Explain the purpose of the focus group, how long it will take, and what feedback they will get. Explain that what participants say will be confidential
11. Give the participants time alone together to talk, if you think that would be appropriate
12. Sit everyone down so that everyone can see everyone else.
13. Start the discussion, starting with easy topics first, but make sure that the topics that you most want to cover are towards the beginning of the session
14. Keep a record - tape recorder (audio tape with multi-directional microphone) and/ or a systematic recording form
15. Prepare data and analyse
16. Report

Identifying and recruiting participants

The sampling frame is developed by identifying key population groups whose opinions you are interested in hearing. This may follow a stakeholder analysis exercise, a participatory wealth ranking exercise or some other method of identifying differentiated groups. This may result in the 'population' being divided by characteristics such as age, wealth, gender, ethnicity, health status, etc. The research team will need to decide how many 'levels' of each characteristic are meaningful for the purposes of the study (e.g., perhaps four income levels, two for gender, three for age) and form a group for each level of each important characteristic.

Take care when recruiting participants in order to avoid systematic bias and friendship groups. Systematic (even random) procedures may be desirable. The membership of each group should be as homogenous as possible, representing a particular segment of the population, but group members should not be close friends (Sherraden, 2001). The aim is to 'create conditions that promote both comfort and independence of thought, in order to maximise discussion and self-disclosure' (ibid).

The researcher will need to make initial contact with the prospective participant, assure them of confidentiality and then ask them several questions to ensure that they fit within one of the groups that are being recruited for. The researcher will also need to clarify the participant's expectations and find out whether they are willing to participate in the focus group discussion.

In reality the identification and recruitment function may need to be delegated to local NGO or research assistant. If this is the case, it is important that they follow guidelines agreed by the research team.

Designing an interview guide for focus groups

The purpose of the interview guide is to provide an overall direction for the discussion. It is not the equivalent of a survey instrument and is not to be followed in detail or even necessarily in order. The guide provides the moderator with topics and issues that are, to the extent possible, to be covered at some point during the group discussion. The guide is loosely structured and does not suggest potential responses (Sherraden, 2001).

The guide should proceed logically from one topic to another and from the general to the specific. It is often useful to have broad questions at the start, to enable the moderator to get

the feel of the group, and to contextualise later and more specific responses. Questions that are more important to the research agenda should be presented early in the session, if possible (ibid). Questions should be unstructured, unbiased, non-threatening, and very simple. Specification should almost always be left to the participants, unless the discussion is decidedly 'off track' at which time the moderator should gently redirect it.

The guide should not be overly detailed or have too many questions. A good focus group interview guide consists of twenty questions or less. Pre-testing the guide with several 'mock' focus groups is essential. The aim is to structure questions so that they are clear and stimulate discussion. Several stages of revisions may be necessary before the guide is ready to be used (ibid).

Facilitating the discussion and recording

Each focus group should have a moderator and a recorder or note taker. It is ideal if the moderator is fluent in the local languages, but if absolutely necessary s/he can work through a research assistant/ translator. It is essential that the recorder/ note taker is fluent in the local languages, as the discussion may contain nuances which will be missed otherwise. Even where local people are fluent in English or the national language, they should be encouraged to hold the discussion in their local mother-tongue.

The moderator's task is to make participants feel at ease and to facilitate open communication on selected topics by asking broad, often open-ended questions, by probing for additional information when necessary, and by keeping the discussion appropriately focused. The moderator should generally follow the interview guide, but participants should be able to express opinions, experiences, and suggestions and should be allowed to lead the discussion in new directions as long as they are relevant to the research in general (Sherraden, 2001). As a result the discussion may not follow the interview guide in the order suggested. The moderator should control the discussion to an appropriate level. Too much control and the discussion is stifled, too little and leaders will emerge from the participant group. The moderator should avoid getting drawn into discussing issues her or himself.

A recorder should tape record the discussion and keep notes of comments in the local language (for later translation, as necessary) on a 'recording instrument' form. Ensure that you have participant's permission to record the session. Check the equipment will pick up all voices at the venue. Much detail can be lost by attempting to simultaneously translate into English or another non-local language, and verbatim quotes may be required later for

inclusion in reports. The 'recording instrument' is similar to the interview guide, except probes are removed and plenty of blank space is inserted between questions to provide room for comments. Because the recorder is unlikely to be able write down all comments as they occur, it is important to tape record the session. Soon after the session, the recorder will use this tape to fill in key comments and quotations on the recording instrument.

However, some researchers prefer not to use recorders, as these can be distracting or off putting for the interviewee. Where they make interviewees anxious they should probably not be used.

In all cases the quality of subsequent analysis depends on the quality of the data stored, so the notes taken, or transcripts made are critical. This is one of the main reasons that a high calibre of researcher is required to make this approach work well.

4.2 Interviews

Much of the discussion about focus groups, particularly on designing the interview guide and recruiting participants has relevance to interviews. In addition, though, researchers need to decide which type of interview is the most appropriate for the objectives of their research (Box 2).

Box 2: Types of interview

Standardised, structured interviews:
Ensures that questions are asked in the same way across a sample population by different interviewers. But risks losing important, unanticipated information.

Guided or open ended interviews:
Keeps interaction focused, covering the same ground with respondent sets, while allowing individual experience to emerge. But cannot divert far, or long, from the agenda without losing part of 'the story'.

Informal, conversational interview:
Allow the interviewer to respond quickly to individual difference and situational changes. But a great deal of time is needed to get systematic information .

Source: Herriot Watt (2000)
Note: a life history interview can include elements of all three types of interview.

4.2.1 Undertaking interviews[1]

Conducting an effective interview requires skill in four key areas:

1. Listening

- Sit or stand still where you are
- Look at the speaker, make a note of non-verbal communication
- Listen for basic fact and main ideas
- Listen for attitudes, opinions, or beliefs
- Do not interrupt the speaker
- Use positive, non-verbal communication to prompt the speaker

[1] This section draws from Higginbotham, J.B., and Cox, K.K. (Eds.) (1979) 'Focus Group Interviews: A Reader.' Chicago: American Marketing Association.

2. Paraphrasing

- Repeat your understanding of their comments in your own words
- Ask the speaker if what you have said is correct and ask for any clarifications
- Make sure key points by the speaker are captured
- Ask as a check to verify understanding
- It can be useful to summarise discussions onto flip charts (etc.) and points during the discussion. This allows participants to correct any misunderstandings, and also to discuss ideas disconnected from the original speaker. This may allow them to be more honest and/ or critical.

3. Probing questions

- Open probe: Questions that begin with how, what, which, when, and who. Effective to encourage responsiveness and reduce defensiveness.
- Compare and contrast: Questions which ask the other person to look for and discuss similarities or differences. These types of questions help the responder to develop and express ideas while allowing the interviewer to steer the direction of the interview.
- Extension: A question that builds on information already provided.
- Clarification: Questions designed to get further explanation about something already said.
- Laundry list: Techniques where the interviewer provides a list of choice options to the interviewee. This encourages the other person to see beyond a single choice and to state a preference.
- Imagining: Any question which allows the individual to imagine or explore an alternative reality by giving themselves a different viewpoint or perspective.

4. Note taking

4.3 Life histories

Life Histories Resource Pack – Kate Bird

This Resource Pack presents guidance on using life histories for research on chronic poverty in low income developing countries. It is partially based on a Chronic Poverty Research Centre workshop in Senegal in 2006, where life history and biographical methods were discussed. The core materials presented there have been adjusted and used in training and research design workshops by the CPRC and the Overseas Development Institute since then.

Example Life History Database, based on Ugandan 'Q2' Research - David Lawson, David Hulme and James Muwonge (May 2006)

The purpose of the example database is to highlight how following up a quantitative panel data set with life history data collection of the same households can assist in understanding some of the main propagators, maintainers and interrupters of chronic and transitory poverty. Here, life history data collection was based on two wave, nationally representative, Ugandan quantitative panel data.

- Overview
- Example of chronically poor household
- Example of household moving into poverty
- Example of household moving out of poverty
- Example of never poor household
- Sample semi-structured life history questionnaire

Further References:

- Report on CPRC Workshop on Panel Surveys and Life History Methods (eds. Baulch and Scott, 2006).
- Financial Diaries, research work undertaken in Bangladesh within the context of *Finance for the Poor and Poorest* research project. The *Financial Diaries* are the result of 42 in-depth case studies undertaken via fortnightly interviews over one year, and incorporate a life history element.
- PANOS Oral Testimonies Page
- Worthman, C. M. and Brown, R. A. (2005) Models of the life-course and the youth-to-adult transition: the life trajectory interview.

4.4 Participatory methods

Participatory research refers to both a set of methods and a methodological approach. Research strategies that emphasise participation have evolved from several sources. Models of development theory and practice that evolved in the 70's and 80's required new research techniques capable of gaining understanding of social complexity in rapidly changing and uncertain environments. These new methods drew upon features of *applied anthropology* and *ethnographic research*, to understand and validate different perceptions of reality, and the benefits of unhurried participant observation. Other origins include Freireian inspired *action-research approaches* that emphasise empowerment of poor people to take action, and use experiential learning to challenge theory and practice. The principle of local people's participation in research also owes much to *farming systems research,* which seeks to understand farmers' own decision making processes, especially in complex and risk prone farming environments. Many of the visual analysis techniques applied in participatory research today, stem from *agroecosystem analysis* which uses informal mapping and diagramming, ranking and scoring methods to explore patterns of time, space, flows, relationships and decisions affecting livelihood systems.

Some of the most influential methodological approaches developed since the late 1970's include RRA, PRA and PLA:

- RRA: Rapid rural appraisal: flexible progressive learning, multi-disciplinary research teams, community participation, outsiders gain information from rural people in a timely and cost effective manner
- PRA: Participatory rural appraisal: shift from extractive mode to empowering and facilitating active local participation in planning activities
- PLA: Participatory learning and action: more emphasis on mutual learning, attitudes and behaviour of researchers, and taking action on the outcomes

4.4.1 Guides for methods specific to participatory research

Mapping

- Integrated Approaches to Participatory Development (IAPAD).
- Mapping Dialogue. A research project profiling dialogue tools and processes for social change. Prepared by Pioneers of Change Associates for GTZ (2006)
- PPgis.net. Open Forum on Participatory Geographic Information Systems and Technologies.

Venn diagrams

- IISD Venn diagrams, webs and trees

Others

- Estrella *et al*. (n.d.) Learning from Change: Issues and experiences in participatory monitoring and evaluation (introductory chapter)
- Norton *et al*. (2001) A Rough Guide to PPAs
- Kanji and Greenwood (2001) Participatory approaches to research and development. IIED
- Participatory Action Research: A Menu of Methods
- Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner's Manual. Joint publication of King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (2005)
- People and Participation. Involve (2005)

4.4.2 Practicalities and difficulties in applying participatory methods

- Raising expectations - one of the dilemmas of researchers working intensely with poor and powerless people to analyse their situation concerns mediating the stages between research and supporting those communities in taking action they have identified. Research facilitators need to express clearly the purpose of the inquiry and what role, if any, they will play in future activities. Experience has shown that people are prepared to 'risk' participating and remain enthusiastic when there is honest communication about what can (and cannot) be expected as a result of the research.
- Skills and attitudes - the accessibility and simplicity of some of the techniques makes it possible to apply them mechanistically without understanding of their use. Successful application requires good communication, facilitation and conflict negotiation skills. Users who are sensitive to local gender and power differences will bring these dimensions into analysis and reflect them in outcomes.
- There's no blue-print **-** choice and sequence of methods needs to be adapted to each situation. This requires good team working skills and has implications for training of researchers.
- Getting the right team **-** requires networking and preparation. Team building is crucial when combining local people, professionals, external researchers, government staff, decision makers
- Staying in the community - logistical practicalities if there is a high proportion of external researchers on the team
- Depth and spread **-** there are payoffs in terms of time, cost and outcomes in deciding between detailed research in fewer research sites and spending less time in a greater range of communities.

4.5 Choosing which methods to use

Herbert and Shepherd (2001) suggest that before embarking on an impact assessment study, the researchers ask themselves the following questions. The questions below can be usefully adapted for any type of poverty-oriented research.

- What are the objectives of the impact assessment? Is it about 'proving' impact or 'improving' the project or service?
- How complex is the project, what type is it (blue print or process), what is already known about it?
- What information is needed?
- When is the information needed?
- How is the information to be used and by whom?
- What level of reliability is required?
- What resources are available (time, money and human)?
- Who is the audience of the impact assessment study?

Quantitative research methods can be used to collect data which can be analysed in numerical form. They pose the questions who, what, when, where, how much, how many, how often? Things are either counted or measured or a set questionnaire is used. Answers can be coded and statistical analysis used to give responses in the form of averages, ratios, ranges etc (Gosling and Edwards, 1995). See Gosling and Edwards for an introduction to using surveys. Qualitative research methods provide greater flexibility and pose questions in a more open-ended manner. This can make analysis and synthesis more difficult.

4.5.1 Strengths and weaknesses of different methods

Different research methods then, have different strengths and weaknesses which need to be taken into account when deciding which methods best suit particular research objectives. Table 3 gives more information.

Table 4: Strengths and weaknesses of key impact methods

Method Criteria	Surveys	Life History based Qualitative Work	Participant Observation	Case Studies	PLA
Coverage (scale of applicability)	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Representative-ness	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Ease of data standardisation, aggregation and synthesis	High	Low	Medium to Low	Low	Medium to Low
Ability to isolate and measure non-intervention causes of change	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Ability to cope with attribution	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Ability to capture qualitative information about poverty reduction	Low	High	High	High	High
Ability to capture causal processes of poverty and vulnerability	Low	High	High	Medium	High
Ability to capture diversity of perceptions about poverty	Low	High	High	Medium	High
Ability to elicit views of women, minorities and other disadvantaged groups about poverty	Low	High	High	High - if targeted	Medium?
Ability to capture unexpected negative impacts on 'the poor'	Low	High	Very High	High	High
Ability to identify and articulate felt needs	Low	High	High	Medium to Low	High
Degree of participation of 'the poor' encouraged by the method	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very High
Potential to contribute to building capacity of stakeholders with respect to poverty analysis	Low	Medium	Low	Medium to Low	Very High

Method Criteria	Surveys	Life History based Qualitative Work	Participant Observation	Case Studies	PLA
Probability of enhancing downwards accountability to poor groups and communities	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Ability to capture the multidimensionality of poverty	Low	High	High	Medium	Very High
Ability to capture poverty impact at different levels- individual, household, community	Low	High	High	Low	High
Human resource requirements	Specialist supervision, large numbers of less qualified field workers	High-skilled practitioners who are able to analyse and write up results	Mid-skilled practitioners. Long time commitment. Need good supervision	Mid-skilled practitioners. Need good supervision	High-skilled practitioners
Cost range	Very High to Medium	High to Medium	Medium to Low	Medium to Low	High to Medium
Timescale	Very High to Medium	Medium to Low	High	High to Medium	Medium to Low

4.5.2 When are certain methods appropriate?[2]

Sample Surveys are appropriate when:

- The intervention affects large numbers
- Accurate estimates of impact are required
- Statistical comparisons must be made between groups over time and/or between locations
- Delivery/implementation mechanisms are operating well, thereby justifying investment in the assessment of impacts
- The target population is heterogeneous and it is difficult to isolate the factors unrelated to the intervention

Rapid Appraisal and/or PLA are appropriate when:

- The intervention is promoting participatory principles in (re)-planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- An understanding of motivations and perceptions is a priority
- One of the purposes of the study is to assess whether or not felt needs are being addressed by the intervention
- The impact of community-based organisations or other institution building activities are of importance
- There is a need to understand the quality of the data collected through surveys
- There is a need for contextual studies before designing more complex monitoring or impact assessment exercises (e.g. case studies or surveys)

Participant Observation and /or Case Studies are appropriate when:

- An understanding of motivations and perceptions is a priority
- Other methods are unlikely to capture the views of women, minorities and other disadvantaged groups
- One of the purposes of the study is to assess whether or not felt needs are being addressed by the intervention

[2] Source: Herbert and Shepherd (2001)

- The impact of community-based organisations or other institution building activities are of importance
- There is a need to understand the quality of the data collected through surveys or rapid appraisals (e.g. causal processes of poverty)
- There is a need for contextual studies before designing more complex monitoring or impact assessment exercises (e.g. before carrying out rapid appraisals or before designing a survey)

Sample Surveys are usually not appropriate when:

- An intervention affects a small number of people
- Policymakers are mainly concerned about the outcomes of the intervention e.g. how many people use the health clinic?
- Implementation is recent and untested and it is likely that the way in which the intervention is implemented will have little impact in the present time
- The purpose of the assessment is to study complex activities or processes (e.g. the development and operation of community-based organisations in poor communities)
- The purpose of the assessment is to document easily observable changes in the physical environment or other tangibles
- The purpose of the assessment is to understand whether or not the intervention is meeting the felt needs of the beneficiaries

Rapid Appraisal and/or PLA are not usually appropriate when:

- Interventions are relatively un-complex, in which bounded locations are not units of analyses (e.g. health centres serving a wide catchment area)
- Indicators of impact are uncontroversial and negative impacts are unlikely
- Standardised and statistically representative generalisations for large and diverse populations are regarded as the sole priority
- Participation of beneficiaries is not a priority

Participant Observation and/or Case Studies are usually not appropriate when:

- The intervention is small and 'uncomplicated' providing a specific service or limited intervention which is unlikely to affect community dynamics beyond a few specific effects (e.g. diseases specific health facilities or campaigns)
- Bounded locations are not units of analysis

- Indicators of impact are clear and easily measurable or assessable (by survey or rapid appraisals)
- Indicators of impact are uncontroversial and negative impacts are unlikely
- Information is needed quickly, and standardised, statistical representative generalisations are regarded as the sole priority

4.6 Combining methods and triangulation

Impact assessments at the project level and other forms of poverty-oriented research have moved increasingly from single method to multi-method approaches (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001). Greater use of participatory approaches in impact assessment has also expanded the toolbox (Hulme, 1997 in Herbert and Shepherd, 2001). Although sample surveys are still common, they are now often combined with participatory and other qualitative approaches, as each key method has its own strengths and weaknesses (see Table 3). Qualitative methods (rapid appraisal, participant observation, PLA) are also often used on their own, particularly for NGO implemented projects (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001).

As a result studies are now able to benefit from the advantages of sample surveys and statistical methods (quantification, representativeness and attribution) and the advantages of the qualitative and participatory approaches (ability to uncover approaches, capture the diversity of opinions and perceptions, unexpected impacts etc.; Herbert and Shepherd, 2001). Which method(s) is/ are chosen depends on the nature of the project, the type of information which is needed (or given priority), the context of the study and the availability of resources (time, money, human) (ibid).

Triangulation is simply using different methods to research the same issue with the same unit of analysis (i.e. an in-depth unstructured interview with each member of a household on health care needs following a survey of household heads on the same topic), thus cross-checking one result against another, and increasing the reliability of the result. Contradictory results often bring up important problems with question design, as well as fundamental issues surrounding researcher understanding of a topic.