

Questions & Answers from the Social Science Training Webinar Series “Data Collection Methods: Household Surveys”

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Q: You mentioned that household surveys are the most authoritative method to collect quantitative data. Does it mean that we should not include questions that will generate qualitative information in a survey?

A: No. Open-ended qualitative questions are fine but should be kept to a few. Only recommended for short answers. If you would like to explore an issue in depth, use interviewing with key informants or participation observation. Don't use surveys because of the pain in coding and analysis (imagine 400 answers of 2 sentences to one question in a sample!)

Q: You mentioned that we should do a pre-test before the real survey. With whom should we do the pretest and how many people should be in the test?

A: Pre-test in the same area as the area you will survey to ensure local comprehension of the questions. First pre-test should be about 25. Second pretest should be about 15.

Q: What do you find most challenging in using this method to collect data in the field and how did you address it?

A: Doing a random sample and choosing controls!

Q: Is there a particular program you would recommend to analyze survey data?

A: SPSS, SAS or SigmaPlot. In areas where these are not available, use EXCEL. It allows for good descriptive data analysis and pretty fancy graphs.

Q: When I was a student, I remember that we need to get a human subject clearance from the university when we do a study with people, do we have something similar at TNC we need to follow? If no, what do you suggest that we do to make sure that the study is ethical and does not cause harm in any way to the people we study.

A: Talked about this in the training.

What are the core TNC SOP's that we need to follow regarding using volunteers to conduct these types of surveys?

A: The most important consideration is the people skills of the enumerators. They have to put people at ease quickly and be detail orientated. If volunteers, great. If you have to hire them, okay too.

What are the core TNC SOP's that we need to follow regarding Training, screening, deployment, safety, liability?

A: I don't think we have an SOP on these.

What are the core TNC SOP's that we need to follow regarding handling the information collected?

A: I would follow the protocol on the ethics training about how to handle records. Besides it is important that the data are confidential.

Q: What types of questions can be asked. In terms of answering the research questions, the survey questions should be related to the indicators that are relevant to the research questions (i.e. what you would like to find out in the study)?

A: In terms of ethics, the issue goes beyond the types of questions themselves. It involves the whole process and activities of a survey. We need to be ethical, respecting confidentiality and ensuring protection of the respondents in all aspects. It is important to not create any possible/potential harm (physical, psychological, political, economic, etc.) to the respondents in any way through the process, activities, data we collected, and the communication of the results.

From Leno Davis, Conservation Coordinator - Bahamas Program

Q: I am interested in both the handling and storage as well as TNC software maybe that can help in analysis. Confidentiality will also be really important because of the social/political structure of the Bahamas. Should there be some formal chain of custody type protocol?

A: Data analysis should be done without individual identifiers. We have the names of those interviewed on the paper questionnaires but do not enter names into the database. Once we have a clean data set, the questionnaires are shredded.

Q: I am interested in which questions particularly represent the social issues that impact conservation and how a survey should be structured. I know that there are attention span limits, and some surveys ask similar questions or the same question in different ways. What is the guiding rule on that?

A: 45 minutes is the optimum time length. 1 hour max. If one suspects that some info may not be truthful, such as income sources or illegal fishing, one can ask in several different ways as a cross-check. I would also refer to other social impacts and socioeconomic monitoring guidelines that are available. Please see Conservation Gateway, section Human and Conservation, sub-section social science and conservation. There are several guidelines posted. It is also important to make the questions relevant to the local setting (including local culture, terms/language, and concepts)

From Eny Buchary in Indonesia:

Q: Does TNC have some kind of SOP/Policy on ethics clearance for data collection methods relevant to household survey? For example, in universities (at least in Canada), they have Ethics Board that give clearance and guidance on the kind of data collection methods and experiment procedure that we would like to employ onto both human and animal subjects.

A: For human subjects, there are clear guidance on whether written or verbal consent is needed to be acquired prior to the interview, whether the questions are intrusive or not, whether the questions would have expected social ramifications, etc., etc. I wish we did and hope we do one day. Our lawyer is looking into that.

from Jim Rieger at WO / Latin America

Q: Please say something about the level at which you can apply the results of your household survey. Is this just to apply to these communities? Or can it be generalized to other communities?

A: Just these communities. Beauty of a HH survey is there's no need to generalize. Generalize the results of the sample to the population the sample is drawn from. Apply the learning to other sites, not the results.

from Emily Fielding (Hawaii program)

Q: Can you explain your process to generate questions prior to the survey design?

A: We look at the expected project impacts and identify indicators to measure these. First thing is to develop the study objectives—what you would like to find out. When the survey questions are developed, check to see how likely the answers/data will meet the objectives. Then test the questions and double-check.

From Eddy Silva

Q: is it possible to do at the same time socioeconomic surveys and the economic value of Protected Areas?

A: Yes! Depends on the valuation methodology but HH surveys are often a good way to establish value such as willingness to pay or existence value.

From Jim Rieger

Q: What are the precautions we need to take to justify the results, if we use qualitative data? It seems like qualitative data could be subject to "attack" from many sides: you talked to the wrong people. You asked the wrong questions. What sort of place-specific information needs to be noted as you are collecting the data to ensure the quality?

A: Keys to having valid and bullet-proof results are: random sample; sufficient sample size; and matched controls. The last is most prone to attack. This is an excellent question, Jim, but one that takes much more time and space to answer. Your same question applies to quantitative data actually. In qualitative research, triangulation is commonly used to make sure that the data are trustworthy, dependable, and credible. Triangulation involves multiple informants, multiple methods, and a wide set of questions to ask. As I mentioned in the presentation today, the researcher functions as a data collecting tool and, so, this requires a high set of skills a person need to possess. Unlike survey data collecting training where enumerators can be relatively quickly trained to ask survey questions and records the answers, the training of researchers to do qualitative data collection takes much longer time to develop (I should say a study), and so does the data collection itself (you need to gain trust and spend enough time in the field to get good data) as well as qualitative data analysis skills. A few excellent books to answer this question include:

Lofland and Lofland. *Analyzing Social Setting: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*
Bernard, Russell. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*.
Merriam, Sharan. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*
Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods*

From Rebecca Tharme, Global Freshwater Program:

Q: Thanks, Craig. Could you please say something about how you chose the socioecological boundaries of the study area (sphere of influence) and thus, which villages for the Lake Tang. HH survey, thanks!

A: Answered on call.

From Chad Wiggins, Hawaii Program:

Q: Are either Craig or Supin familiar with participatory mapping technology (e.g. Ebeam) to collect quantitative geospatial information in conjunction with surveys. If so, is this technology useful?

A: Answered on call.

From Kara Nelson, Washington Chapter

Q: Craig, can you give us the title of the 2 page summary you wrote so it's easy to find on the link?

A: Link is <http://www.conservationgateway.org/subtopic/social-science-and-conservation-0> The title is: Social science methods and tools for working with communities: Household Surveys.