

## How to conduct an effective interview

**Introduce yourself.** Explain who you are, why you are speaking with the person and what you hope to understand from them. Tell them how their story might be used and where it might appear, including on websites or news media. Take a bit of time just to chat in a relaxed way at the start to help make the person feel comfortable.

**Ask their name and other details.** Have them write their name if they're capable – it's the surest way to get it right. If you're talking to an official, ask for their business card – it's another way to check details. Ask what they do for a living, where they live, how long they've lived there, what their title is if they have one. And ask for contact details if possible – a mobile phone number or email – so you can follow up with questions you may have later.

**Start out with broad general questions.** Such as: How are things going here? Talk me through what's happening. What have you seen? What do you think about it? What concerns you? What do you notice? What do you think will happen next?

**Move toward more specific questions.** Once you've heard their ideas about what's happening, you can begin to ask more specific questions that follow up on any interesting things they've said during the broad general questions or things you need to know. Often these are questions of: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Try to make sure all of those are answered by the end of the interview.

What might you ask? Some ideas include: How many people are involved with that? Where is it happening? How is that different from what happened earlier? What did that person say, specifically? Why do you think that's happening?

**Double check.** Hone in on very specific facts and don't be afraid to ask again. Ask: Did you say it's now 100 people involved? In which districts exactly is this happening? How much have savings grown? Am I right in thinking xxxx? Is it true that.....? It can be useful sometimes to repeat something they've said that you're not sure about and ask if you've got it right.

**Get comparisons.** If someone tells you they harvested 10 bags of grain this season, ask how that compares to last season, or a time before the project started. For a reader unfamiliar with the situation, 10 bags will not mean much, but showing that the harvest has gone from 6 bags to 10 bags will! Similarly ask: How many people are involved now and how many were involved last year (or at some other relevant period)? Etc.

**Don't be afraid to ask again, or ask someone to say it more simply.** Say: I'm sorry, I didn't quite understand that. Could you tell me again? Or, Is there a simpler way you could explain that? I'm not sure the people reading my story will understand as they're not so familiar with this situation.

**Ask what went wrong as well as what went right.** The story you write from the interview will be more believable if you talk about the challenges faced, and, with luck, how they are being addressed or what has been learned, rather than just talking about what went well.

**Ask for examples.** If someone tells you there are new livelihoods in the village, ask what some of those are. If they say women are more involved than before, ask them to tell you of one example where that happened.

**What if the person diverges from the topic?** Sometimes a person being interviewed will start talking about a subject that isn't the one you're trying to find out about. If time for the interview is short, try gently asking the person if they could first address your questions, and then maybe come back to this issue later? If you have plenty of time, it can be worth listening for a couple of minutes to the new topic – the person may bring up something important you'd hadn't thought about asking. If you don't have time, be polite but firm and steer the conversation back to what you need to find out: "I appreciate you might not have a lot of time to speak with me – could we speak about this issue first?"

**At the end:** Ask: Is there anything I missed asking about? Do you have any questions? This gives the person you're interviewing a chance to bring up something they think is important and you might have missed asking about – and that they might be too shy to insist on talking about unless you ask this question. Also ask: Is there anybody else I should be talking to about this? They might point you to your next good interview opportunity.

**Say thanks.** It's obvious, but remember to thank the person you're interviewing for their time.