

Using Qualitative Methods in Farmer-Participatory Research

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Why talk to farmers?

- Farmer participatory research requires input from farmers
- We need to talk to farmers before, during and after research
- We need to listen to, record and act on their views
- We need to develop a structure by which to do this

Differentiating between research and chatting

- We want to differentiate between individual and general opinion
- We want robust data collection, not anecdotes
- We need to know how to carry out qualitative research

- Qualitative research is not wishy-washy, but collected with structure and method and analysed rigorously to provide sound results

Data collection: Sampling

- Probability sampling and non-probability sampling
- Identifying small samples
 - Purposive sampling
 - Snow-balling
 - Clustered sampling
- Other issues
 - Trustworthiness
 - Cooperation
 - Access
 - Key informant

Data collection: Interviewing

- Establish a relationship with interviewee which is relaxed, informal, equal
- Establish a mutually convenient time and place to meet
- Semi-structured interview
 - Core questions, but flexibility to explore issues in more detail
 - Use interrogators: who? what? where? when? why? how?
 - avoid leading questions and value judgment
 - Use scales, rating, ranking exercises

Recording information

- Take copious notes, or record interview on tape
- Post interview, add context, fill in gaps
 - add new questions
- Observations and lurking
- Remember, can gather information at group discussions as well as individual interviews

Data Analysis

- Review notes / Listen to tapes
- Identify key themes and issues
- Use coding in notes
- Develop analysis tables
- Draw out themes
- Use case studies of particular individuals
- Use of quotes and local phrases

Sample analysis table: Why farmers leave organic sector

	Farmer Smith	Farmer Jones	Farmer Brown
Organic regulations	Inspection too time-consuming	Inspector not supportive, nit-picky	No problem
Techniques of organic farming	Ok, almost farming organically anyway	Difficulty with weed control	Challenging but managing
Market	No buyer for organic milk in his area	Prices not as high as expected	Producing organic cheese on premises to sell in farm shop
Personal	Death in family, gave up farm-tenancy	Retirement	Foot and Mouth disease

Quality control in qualitative research

- Consistency
 - Researcher trained in interviewing techniques
 - SSI ensures comparable data collected from each interview
 - Awareness of potential bias in process
- Corroboration
 - Triangulation
- Evidence
 - Document the process (method, analysis)
 - Transcripts

Case studies

- Illustrate issues clearly
- Provide opportunity for depth of analysis
- Enable more holistic analysis
- Useful in explaining relationships

Summary

- Qualitative research is a useful method for discovery, explanation
- There is a structure and method to qualitative research which will provide academic rigour
- Qualitative research complements, rather than replaces, scientific research