RutgersWPF

EXPLORE

Toolkit for involving young people as researchers in sexual and reproductive health programmes

Monitoring and evaluation and research in SRHR programmes for young people: **Handbook**

EXPLORE

Toolkit for involving young people as researchers in sexual and reproductive health programmes

This toolkit is based on the original Explore toolkit but enhanced with experiences and materials of the 'Do They Match' Participatory Research Project; Rutgers WPF's experience with training and involving young people in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and research; and IPPF's experiences with rapid PEER reviews carried out by young people.

The training methodologies described in this toolkit have been applied and tested in different settings in Africa and Asia, with different groups of young people (children, adolescents, young people, with different social and educational backgrounds) and in relation to different research and M&E activities and projects. The training methodologies are developed in interaction with young people and on the basis of their feedback and evaluations. We consider this toolkit a work in progress, as the methodology continues to develop through experience.

The development of this toolkit would not have been possible without the financial support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the staff of the youth team at IPPF central office, the staff of the international research department of Rutgers WPF, staff from IPPF's member associations and Rutgers WPF's partner organizations, and the young researchers involved in the research projects, M&E and PEER review activities.

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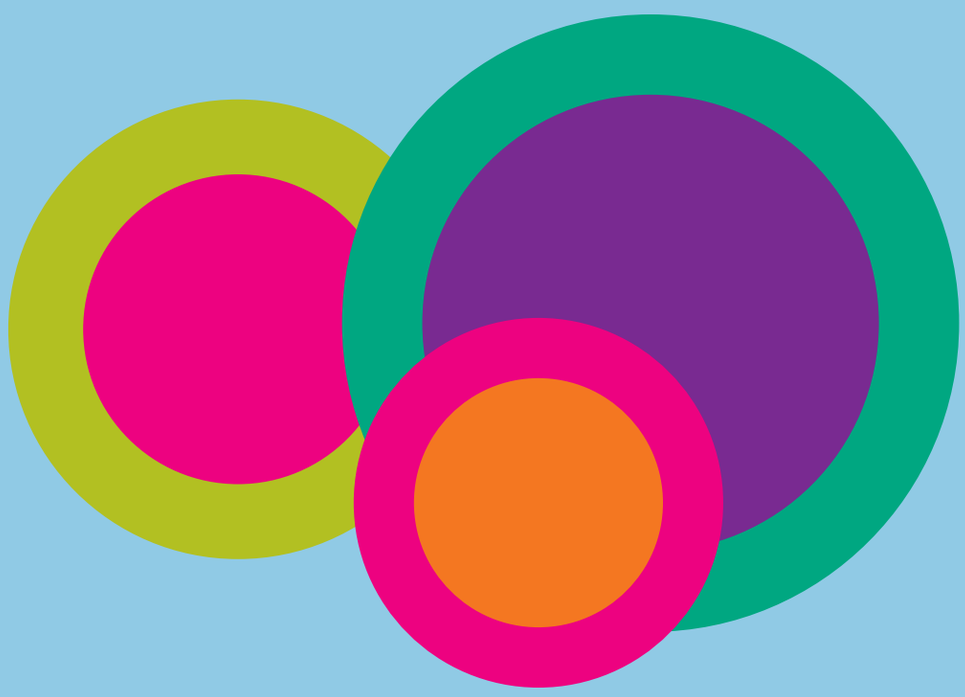
Introduction to this handbook

This handbook is part of the Explore toolkit for involving young people in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and research. We refer to the toolkit for instructions on how to compose your own specific training and for instructions on how to conduct an effective, youth-friendly training and how to support the young researchers during the M&E and research process.



This training manual was developed within the context of the Youth Incentives international programme on Young People and Sexuality of the Rutgers NISSO Group, presently Rutgers WPF. The M&E and research training was developed to train both professional staff of partner organizations and youth volunteers wanting to be involved in monitoring and research. The training aims to provide understanding, skills and tools to implement monitoring, evaluation and research within a youth SRHR programme that follows a logframe approach. Therefore, this training specifically focuses on working with this approach, although we realize there are many alternative designs for monitoring and evaluation that are not described in this manual.

The implementation of M&E plans is central to this training. Certain research elements are crucial for the implementation of an M&E plan, including collecting data, analysing this data and drawing conclusions from these findings for the improvement of the project. To strengthen the implementation of the M&E plans, this training incorporates these fundamental elements of research.

The handbook provides detailed information on topics discussed during the training, and can be used for looking up information and instructions on:

- defining qualitative indicators
- development of data collection plan for M&E
- data collection techniques
- data analysis, reliability and validity, drawing conclusions
- qualitative result reporting
- application of M&E data for project improvement
- terms and definitions used in M&E and research

Furthermore, for those interested, the handbook provides in-depth insights that go beyond the scope of the original training.

We appreciate your feedback on this handbook. We consider it a living document, which – based on your feedback – will be adapted and evolved to be of optimal utility for its users. Please send your feedback by email to: **m.vanreeuwijk@rutgerswpf.nl** or **r.vanzorge@rutgerswpf.nl**

Goal

The information in this handbook can help you to make a complete and comprehensive M&E plan and to enhance your skills to carry out research and implement the M&E plan.

Building blocks

The chapters in this handbook follow the building blocks (overarching themes) of the training:

Building block 1: Defining the qualitative indicators of the M&E plan

Building block II: Developing skills for data collection for M&E

Building block III: Reflecting on data analysis and formulating conclusion

Building block IV: Applying M&E data for project improvement

ABBREVIATIONS

FGD	focus group discussion
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IEC	information, education and communication
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MoV	means of verification
NGO	non-governmental organization
PME	planning, monitoring and evaluation
RAP	rights, acceptance, participation
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
STI	sexually transmitted infection

Contents

Chapter 1: General information on monitoring and evaluation

1.1 Why we need monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can:

- Help you identify problems and their causes
- Suggest possible solutions to problems
- Raise questions about assumptions and strategies
- Push you to reflect on where you are going and how you are getting there
- Provide you with information and insight
- Encourage you to act on the information and insights
- Increase the likelihood that you will make a positive development difference
- Increase accountability to beneficiaries, stakeholders, (implementing) organizations and donors

To be able to monitor and evaluate, it is crucial to have identified what your project wants to achieve, how you plan to achieve this and what results you are satisfied with!

Therefore, monitoring and evaluation involves:

- Establishment of indicators (to measure achievements)
- Setting up systems to collect information related to these indicators
- Collecting and recording the information
- Analyzing the information
- Using the information to manage/inform your project = learning

1.2 The difference between monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are different activities; they are related but not identical.

Monitoring is a continuous process, which ensures that the activities are carried out according to plan – in terms of content, time and costs.

Evaluation is a periodic assessment of how we are doing things; if we are achieving what we set out to achieve.

Box 1 on the next page shows the specific characteristics of monitoring and evaluation and their differences

BOX 1: Differences between monitoring and evaluation

MONITORING	EVALUATION
Continuous: during the entire project	Periodic: at certain milestones, for example: > Mid-term of the programme > End of the programme > After a substantial period of project conclusion
Keeps track and oversight	In-depth analysis
Documents progress and warns of difficulties in progress	Compares planned with actual achievements
Focuses on: > Inputs > Activities > Outputs > Implementation processes > Continued relevance > Likely results	Focuses on: > Outputs in relation to inputs > Results in relation to costs > Processes to achieve results > Overall relevance > Impact > Sustainability
Answers what activities were implemented and what results achieved	Answers why and how results were achieved. Contributes to building theories and models for changes
Alerts managers to problems and provides options for solutions/ corrective actions	Provides managers with strategy and policy options
Self-assessment by all involved in the implementation of the project	Internal or external analysis by those involved in the project or by external evaluators

1.3 Important elements in M&E

Standard elements in evaluation and programme performance monitoring are the concepts of **efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and sustainability**. When gathering information concerning the project and its processes, it can be useful to reflect on how the project is advancing in terms of these categories.

Efficiency: tells you whether the input (time, money, resources) into the work is appropriate in terms of the output.

Effectiveness: tells you the extent to which the objectives are achieved; whether activities have actually contributed towards the changes that were expected to occur.

Relevance: tells you the extent in which the objectives of the project/ intervention are (still) consistent with the (beneficiaries') needs and situation (the physical and policy environment).

Sustainability: tells you the likelihood whether results/changes resulting from the intervention will be maintained (after the project).

1.4 The role of research in M&E

Research can be defined as:

A study or investigation with the aim to find new information or reach a new understanding about a certain topic.

Research is an organized and systematic way of finding answers to questions.

- An organized and systematic way means using **data collection methods**.
- The information that helps you to find an answer to your question is called **data**.
- The source that provides you with the data is called the **data source**. If this source is a person, this person is called **an informant**.
- The process that leads to answering your question is called **data analysis**.

Research is important for M&E because in M&E we want to answer the question: *Does a certain project activity have an effect and what is this effect?* You need this information to know:

- If you are achieving what you set out to do (if you are achieving your objectives)
- What the factors are that enable you or limit you in achieving your objectives
- If you are on the right track or if you need to make adaptations

Within M&E plans, indicators are formulated to measure progress towards objectives and data collection on the indicators is required. But in order to collect data, with the help of research methods, you will need to reformulate the indicator into a **research question**. The formulation of a research question will help you:

- To focus the data collection (narrowing it down to the essentials)
- To avoid collection of data that are not strictly necessary for understanding and solving the problem you have identified
- To plan and organize the data collection in clearly defined parts or phases

Research within M&E will help you to formulate the following:

- What we want to know (the research question)
- What kind of information we need to collect
- How we will get this information
- Who should be involved

1.5 Indicators

1.5.1 WHAT IS AN INDICATOR?

An indicator is the measure that is used to assess if an objective has been achieved or what progress has been made. Indicators help you understand where you are, which way you are going and how far you are from where you want to be.

An indicator provides an answer on whether we achieve what we set out to achieve (and how we do it). The indicator specifies what data needs to be collected to answer this question or to explore an issue.

1.5.2 OUTPUT INDICATORS AND OUTCOME INDICATORS

There are several types of indicators, and in this training we focus specifically on indicators that measure if something has been done (output) or if results have been achieved (outcome).

Output indicators

Outputs are directly observable products, processes or results of activities. An output indicator is a measurable sign of the direct outputs of activities; it is **activity-based**. Examples of output indicators could include:

- Number of peer educators trained
- Number of condoms distributed
- Number of community members present during community events
- Number of articles published

Output indicators are mainly quantitative. They do not give any information on changes, but merely indicate numbers.

Outcome indicators

Outcome indicators measure actual benefits or changes resulting from your activities. For example behavioural change or improved client satisfaction. These are benefits or changes for the involved beneficiaries of the project which can be directly contributed to the intervention.[1] Contrary to output indicators that are activity-based, outcome indicators are **result-based**.

Sometimes it is difficult to develop an indicator which has a direct link to your objectives. In that case indicators are developed that are called **proxy-indicators**, which produce indirect measurements or signs that represent a change.

1.5.3 QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

Quantitative measurement tells you how much or how many.

Qualitative measurement tells you how people feel about certain issues, how people behave or how things are done.

Qualitative indicators translate intangible concepts into tangible and observable expressions. For instance, increased youth participation can be translated into: Young people have become members of decision-making bodies in which they have an equal vote to adults.

Output indicators are generally quantitative. Outcome indicators can be both quantitative (e.g. increased number of young people visiting youth-friendly services) or qualitative (e.g. increased satisfaction of young people visiting clinics).

1.5.4 DEVELOPING A 'SMART' INDICATOR

The development of outcome indicators is more complex than the development of output indicators, because with outcome indicators you are searching for indicators for change, which is often a rather intangible concept. To make the concepts of change measurable and tangible, you will start a creative thinking process to decide what measurable differences indicate a specific change.

Therefore indicators should reflect the main goals and objectives of your programme (and should be consistent with the programme's sphere of influence).

Your programme/intervention should have clear targets, which are presented by the indicators:

- What changes you intend to achieve
- For whom and with whom the changes will occur
- How changes are being generated
- When (period of time) the changes will occur

1. Impact indicators will measure long-term results, to which your intervention has contributed. They measure long-term changes, for example a decrease in unwanted pregnancies for girls.

Your indicators will help you measure your achievements. To do so, indicators need to be 'SMART'. For outcome indicators this means the following:

Specific: The indicator needs to be specific on the who/what/when and where. For example; 'increased knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and rights' is too broad; specify this to 'increased knowledge on prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for boys and girls in city X because of school education programme'.

Measurable: The indicator needs to have the capacity to be counted, observed, tested or analysed. For example, 'increased knowledge on STIs from 20% to 50% of target group'.

Achievable/Attainable: You should set realistic indicators, plans that are too ambitious will only cause frustration.

Relevant: The indicators should have a clear link to your objectives.

Time-bound: You should specify within which time frame you aim to achieve your results.

Please note: There is no clear consensus about the definition of the SMART keywords, and you might find slightly different definitions, depending on the source and context. However, whatever the definitions given to the individual keywords, generally all principles as described above are covered.

SMART stands for:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Relevant
Time-bound

Chapter 2: Means of verification and data collection methods

2.1 Means of verification

Once indicators are developed, you need to decide what information you will gather to inform your indicator. The most practical way is to reformulate the indicator into a research question. For example:

Indicator: Miranda and Ruth will be able to cook five good-quality local dishes by the end of April.

Question: Can Miranda and Ruth cook five good-quality local dishes by the end of April?

The next step is to ask yourself the question: *How do I know that the two women are able to cook good-quality local food?*

Options for obtaining relevant information are for example:

- Checking the quality of the food (for example by tasting)
- Checking their knowledge on how to cook local food
- Checking opinions of others (for example by asking their families)
- Making pictures or a video of their food to check with others if it looks good

There are many options to check whether cooking skills are improved. Using all options is not efficient, and not needed. In your M&E plan you will decide which data you find the most important to gather[2], and in what form or through what method this information will be presented. This will be your **means of verification** (MoV). Means of verification describe how the project will verify whether the outcomes or outputs have been achieved.

Let us say we have chosen to assess progress in the indicator by checking:

- The quality of the food they produce
- Their knowledge of local cooking

We have decided what we want to know: *Can Miranda and Ruth cook local dishes?* We also know what information we will gather; on **quality** and **knowledge**. The next step is to decide on how to get this information; our **data collection methodology**.

2.2 Data collection methods

2.2.1 QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE

In order to check the **quality** of the food, and the **knowledge** of local cooking, you can use various methods.

For checking the quality of the food it is logical to taste the food. It is also good to get the opinion of more than one person, to make it more objective.
So, we could organize a tasting panel to assess the taste of the food.

2. The choice will be based on different elements (efficiency, available resources, reliability, skills needed, etc.) which are discussed later in this chapter (paragraph 2.3 Making choices).

For checking Miranda and Ruth's knowledge of local cooking it is logical to ask them to take a test.

Assessing the taste is not something that you can count or measure in numeric values. The people from the panel will describe how the food tastes and whether they like it or not. This is called a **qualitative assessment**: the panel does **qualitative research** and what they write down is called **qualitative data**.

On the other hand, assessing the knowledge that the women have on local cooking is done through a test, and we can count how well they score (the amount of questions answered correctly/incorrectly). Therefore, using the test, or questionnaire, is called **quantitative research** and the information obtained through the test or questionnaire is called **quantitative data**.

The type of data that you want to collect (quantitative or qualitative) has consequences for the way you choose your data sources or informants, the methods that you can use and how you are going to analyse the data. Every method has its own positive (pros) and negative aspects (cons) relating to difficulty, efficiency, costs, trustworthiness, etc. Because of this, it is good to know the differences between quantitative and qualitative research and data. Box 2 describes the difference between quantitative and qualitative research and data and the main pros and cons.

BOX 2: Differences between quantitative and qualitative research and data

METHOD	DESCRIPTION	PROS	CONS
QUANTITATIVE DATA	**Information expressed in terms of measurable numeric values.** Examples are surveys or information that is expressed through attaching a certain value to something (e.g. on a scale from 0–10) so that it can be counted.	✔ Does not matter too much who conducts the research as it does not depend on researcher's skills. ✔ Gives you a good overview of things that count for a big group of people. ✔ Quantitative data is useful if you want to know how general or common something is, or when you want to know about the frequency of a certain phenomenon. i.e. how many. ✔ Often seen as more objective/scientific because using mathematics it can be calculated if certain relationships are statistically significant. The results should be the same, no matter who conducts the research (has high reliability, see paragraph 5.2 and Annex A).	✘ Not in-depth, no opportunity to ask for explanations and if topic is sensitive (e.g. sexual behaviour). There is a high chance that respondents write down something different than their actual behaviour or opinions. In this case the method is found to have a low validity (see paragraph 5.2 and Annex A).
QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH	To collect quantitative data, you have to ask **closed-ended questions**, so the answers can be categorized and counted. Questionnaires and services statistics are examples of quantitative research.		

BOX 2: Differences between quantitative and qualitative research and data

METHOD	DESCRIPTION	PROS	CONS
QUALITATIVE DATA	**Information in the form of descriptions that cannot be written in numbers**. Examples are stories about feelings, meanings, experiences, attitudes and beliefs. Qualitative data is gathered with the aim to understand something, like (sexual) behaviour and the reasons why and how something happens.	✔ Detailed information that help you to understand something. ✔ If it is carried out well, the information is more trustworthy compared to quantitative data and therefore these methods are better to use for sensitive themes like sexuality.	✘ More difficult to carry out well, because you need good researcher skills. ✘ The kind of data collected depends on what questions researcher asks and how s/he asks the questions, on the setting and whether s/he has rapport with the informant, etc. ✘ Another researcher could collect completely different data from the same informants in the same setting. This is generally referred to as **researcher bias**.[3] ✘ Data is collected with less informants and therefore less representative for the bigger group.
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	To collect qualitative data, you have to ask **open-ended questions**, like questions that start with why and how. But data can also be collected through observations, if that helps the researcher to understand something better. Other qualitative data collection techniques are discussed below.		

2.2.2 OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION METHODS

For the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, there is a variety of methods available. Some methods that are used frequently are surveys, literature review, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Box 3 on the next few pages gives an overview of the most important methods that are used in research and M&E. The last column on youth friendliness reflects on how and if young people can participate in this method, both as informants and as data collectors. Reading the information in the box can help you to make decisions on what kind of method you want to use for collecting data on the indicators of your own M&E plan.

2.3 Making choices: Developing a data collection plan

Gathering information involves many different methodological and practical decisions. To make realistic choices and a realistic planning it is helpful to write down these elements in a data collection plan. Annex B provides an example of such a plan. A data collection plan includes the following elements:

- Source of information
- Research population
- Number/amount of data to be gathered (taking into account gender/age)
- Place for data collection
- Time for data collection
- Division of tasks (who will prepare/collect/arrange/analyze?)
- Data recording (how?)
- Available resources and indication of costs (time/money, etc.)

3. Bias is a term used to describe something that has influenced the outcome (e.g. data, results) and the outcome is therefore less trustworthy.

BOX 3: Overview of data collection methods

METHOD AND EXAMPLES	PROS	CONS	YOUTH FRIENDLY?
QUESTIONNAIRE/ SURVEY	✔ Large scale, generalizable, can examine correlations (if one variable has a relationship with another) ✔ Seen as more scientific/ objective (results the same no matter who conducts the data collection) ✔ Measurable numeric values, so can be counted	✘ Desirability bias, only literate informants, need to know if everyone understands the question the same way. ✘ Cannot investigate in-depth (reasons, explanations, meanings)	■ Neutral ■ Young people can help to carry out the surveys
SECONDARY DATA ■ Reports, texts, statistics, literature	✔ Already available ✔ Desk work	✘ Might not be exactly the data you require ✘ Data may be biased or not reliable ✘ Sometimes too much work	■ Neutral
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION[4] ■ Interaction of men and women in a pub ■ Teaching sexuality education in a school ■ Service providers responding to young unmarried clients in a clinic	✔ Direct observation of behaviour in natural setting (no reasoning/ justification by informant) ✔ Researcher is 'undercover' ✔ Better able to include factors you might not have thought of beforehand	✘ Time-consuming, much work to transcribe and analyse notes ✘ Ethical questions might arise as informants are not informed/have not given their consent	■ Role for young people/participation of target group, as they are the best persons to integrate with and be accepted by study group
INTERVIEW ■ Data in form of description of feelings, meanings, attitudes, reasons, e.g. > stories of change > exit interviews > consult/counselling	✔ Personal! Allows for in-depth studying of why and how, for understanding what is at stake for the person studied instead of what is at stake for the NGO/donor. ✔ Good method to assess impact, whether your activity or intervention has changed anything and on which levels ✔ Good for illustrating other (quantitative) data ✔ Good for assessing behaviour that is not conforming to the norm	✘ Rapport and trust needed ✘ Time-consuming ✘ Researcher bias (researcher 'colours' the data) – data depends on skills and rapport of researcher, and on setting/location	■ Because informants will talk more openly to someone they trust, or think will understand them (they can relate to), there is a role for young people in conducting the interviews ■ Young informants generally like to be interviewed, if it is done in a non-threatening way

4. For a more elaborate definition, see Annex A.

BOX 3: Overview of data collection methods

METHOD AND EXAMPLES	PROS	CONS	YOUTH FRIENDLY?
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD)[5] ■ Asking opinions from women about male behaviour in all-female group ■ Debates, e.g. between boys and girls on responsibility/ condom use	✔ Sometimes easier to talk 'as a group' than as an individual (group safety, group agency) ✔ Good for assessing norms, what is expected and how it is judged ✔ Good for checking inconsistencies and contradictions ✔ Good for checking if something is valid for bigger group	✘ Because of the group setting, less assertive people conform to the opinion of 'leaders' in the group. Therefore normative data ✘ Composition and setting of group can influence the data you collect, you should reflect on this	■ Young people generally like FGDs as they are a safe way to talk about sexuality without revealing anything personal ■ Young people could facilitate FGDs because they might better know/feel what is important to the group and relate better to the informants
CASE STUDY[6] To understand: ■ why someone becomes a sex worker, addicted to drugs, engages in multiple relationships ■ how sexual violence comes into existence, what contexts facilitate this ■ how courtship/partner selection works (for example in relation to negotiation of condoms)	✔ Can focus on one case ✔ Gain in-depth understanding of complex issues ✔ The personal story can be more appealing than statistics. Illustration/ explanation of other data	✘ Limited applicability to other situations/people ✘ Time-consuming, much work to transcribe and analyse notes	■ By focusing on one person/case, there is room to develop rapport with the person(s) under study. Case study can help the informant to feel understood. Role for young people to conduct case studies
ROLE-PLAY ■ Courtship 'temptations', reasons to engage in sex ■ Reasons to drop out of school ■ Can role play parents, peers, partners	✔ Projective method: not necessarily revealing personal experiences, therefore useful for collecting information on sensitive issues ✔ Good way to show complexity and what happens in social interactions. Yet also consensus of group that it works this way ✔ Can be a tool for advocacy/awareness-raising	✘ Difficult to analyse, best way is to record on film and literally transcribe ✘ Sometimes exaggerations ✘ Some people may be too shy to perform/act	■ Young people can perform/act and write their own scripts. It is a youth-friendly method to express themselves, the complexity and reality of their lives ■ Fun to do

5 and 6. For a more elaborate definition, see Annex A.

BOX 3: Overview of data collection methods

METHOD AND EXAMPLES	PROS	CONS	YOUTH FRIENDLY?
ESSAYS/DIARIES ■ 'Sex' diaries ■ Essays on personal stories, experiences	✔ Good for collecting very personal information, for instance on sexual practices/condom use/first-time sex/ sexual violence or harassment/gender inequality	✘ Difficult to analyse ✘ Not always reliable as information might be biased through desirability or shame ✘ A lot of work for informant	■ If anonymous it can be a non-threatening way of revealing personal information ■ Allows young people to be honest and open about their sexuality. But is a lot of work for informant
PICTURES/FILM ■ As part of case study and/or participant observation ■ As data recording tool during interviews, FGDs	✔ Gives impression, personalizes, can show feelings/emotions, reach wider audience ✔ Good as an advocacy tool ✔ Play back to fill in memory gaps, to allow second opinion on interpretation ✔ Encourages others to discuss issue ✔ Literal transcription, so less researcher bias	✘ Multi- interpretable. ✘ Much work to transcribe, code and analyse the data ✘ 'Overacting', exaggerations or shyness because of camera ✘ Not anonymous	■ Youth-friendly way of data collection. Young people can interview each other and 'professional' researcher has access to this data
DRAWINGS/MAPPING ■ Mapping 'unsafe' places (e.g. in village) ■ Examining 'explanatory models' relating to the body, health and sickness	✔ Ice breaker for difficult topics, good entry point for discussion ✔ Useful for shy/young people	✘ Difficult to interpret/ analyse ✘ Has to be followed by an interview or discussion where the informant can explain the drawing or map	■ Not frightening, everyone can do it (including illiterate young people), fun to do. But can be seen as childish by older youth

2.3.1 DATA SOURCES

A data source is a source that can provide you with information that informs your indicator/answers your question(s). Before you start collecting data, you have to think of the sources where you can find that information. It is advisable to first ask yourself: what sources are already available? You could think, for example, of:

- (statistical) data from earlier (quantitative) research (e.g. data from the literature, other research)
- data from reports (e.g. evaluation report, field reports of the programme. Sometimes these reports contain information on observations that can be useful)
- field notes (on discussions, activities, trainings)
- minutes (of meetings, trainings)
- materials used during the project (e.g. advocacy materials, IEC materials)
- photographic materials or videos (of activities)
- television reports
- newspaper articles

When you have answered the question of what sources are already available, you should question if you need additional, new or more information and what sources you need to collect this information from. To find information for qualitative indicators, you will often find that you have to ask for information from a person, or persons, who in research we call **informants**.

Examples of informants are persons who belong to your target group. But informants can also be relatives of persons from the target group (e.g. parents, siblings), stakeholders (e.g. local leaders, teachers), implementers (e.g. service providers, peer educators) or experts (e.g. professionals, tasting panel). You should think about selecting the people that can best answer your questions and can give you answers that are most trustworthy. Often it helps to interview people with different perspectives, to get the complete picture. For example: young people who participated in peer education sessions and peer educators themselves.

2.3.2 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The group of informants that you have selected to participate in the research is called the **research population**. A difficult question is: *How many people do you need?* And related to that, *how much data do you need to collect? When do you have enough?* These questions relate to the discussion in paragraph 5.4 on the quality of data and drawing a conclusion. In principle, your conclusion becomes stronger and more trustworthy if it is based on an increasing amount of data, coming from different sources.

For the example of Miranda and Ruth cooking local dishes, you would more easily believe that these women can cook good food if this was the shared opinion of five local experts in a tasting panel, as compared to the opinion of, say, the mother of Miranda.

Of course there are limitations to how much data you can collect or how many different persons you can question. These limitations are often set by time and money. In order to ensure a good quality of data and drawing valid and trustworthy conclusions, you can take the following steps:

- **Selection of informants:** Make sure you select the people who can best answer your questions and can give you answers that are most trustworthy. Within this selection, make sure you include informants who have different backgrounds, different personalities, different socio-economic status, different ages, different gender. This will help with justifying generalizations and to strengthen your analysis and conclusion.

7. Please ensure youth participation in all phases of the research.

- **Create an enabling environment:** Make sure the methods, techniques and setting that you choose help the informants to speak openly and honestly (see Chapters 3 and 4 on interviews and FGDs).
- **If possible, use mixed methods:** It is better to conduct both interviews and FGDs than only one of these methods, because people will say different things in different settings. If you collect data from different settings you can check what is different and find out why.
- **Check consensus and conflicts:** If many people agree on an explanation, you can be fairly confident that you are on the right track. But, if there is conflicting information (e.g. between what boys say and what girls say), you will have to investigate the reason for this in order to draw a correct conclusion.
- **Always check for gender:** Does something count for boys as well as for girls and vice versa?
- **Verify/check your main conclusions with some informants**.

Broadly speaking, if you conduct the FGDs and interviews well, you will need between 5–10 different sessions with different informants in order to have enough basis to draw conclusions. For quantitative methods this number is much higher and it depends on how much data you need (e.g. does it need to be representative? Do you want to prove significant relationships?).

2.3.3 PLACE, TIME, DIVISION OF TASKS AND DATA RECORDING

Place and time: The choice of a place and a time for data collection depends very much on your informants. Ask them what they prefer. Remember, you want them to feel at ease, so let them choose the time and place!

Division of tasks: It is important to prepare the data collection well. If you are working in a team, make clear agreements on who will do what. The kind of tasks you should consider:[8]

- Preparation of interview questions (can be done in a team, but often done by the person who also does the interviewing or facilitation)
- Arrangement for the data collection: arrangement of time and place, transportation, money, means, etc.
- Data collection: facilitator/interviewer/observer/evaluator/data recorder
- Data recording: taking notes, filming, tape recording, taking pictures, arranging essays or diaries, etc.
- Data analysis and report writing

It is important that you think of a budget for all these expenses, to ensure you will not run out of money before you have collected enough data. To help you with planning, you can use a table like the (part of a) data collection plan presented in Annex B.

8. See also the steps on the preparation of an interview/FGD in the next chapters.

Chapter 3: In-depth interview: Tips and techniques

3.1 Introduction

An interview mostly takes place between two people, the researcher and the informant. An interview can be structured, semi-structured or spontaneous. In a structured interview, the researcher asks a predetermined set of questions. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of questions, but depending on the answers new topics of interest might come up and the researcher can decide to add new questions. A spontaneous interview is an unplanned interview, resulting from an interesting conversation.

3.2 Preparing an interview

Before you start conducting interviews, you first have to make some preparations. There are six steps you should take to prepare yourself for the interviews.

1. Formulate a research question

The first thing you should do, is to formulate a research question – what is it you exactly want to know?

2. Formulate sub-questions

Once you have formulated your main question, the second step is to divide your main question into themes and sub-questions. For example, you want to know about the effects of the peer education activities in your project. So your main research question could be: *What is the effect of the peer education sessions held in …* (time period) *among …* (target group) *in …* (a particular area)*?* Then your sub-questions could include:

- *How did the informant experience the session?*
- *What is the informant's opinion of the peer educators?*
- *What did the informant learn during the session?*
- *What did the informant find useful?*
- *Can the informant explain why/how he/she uses the information or skills that he/she acquired during the peer education session(s)?*
- *Why did the informant go to the session?*
- *What was not nice/useful during the session? What could be improved?*
- *Did participating in the session(s) lead to any changes for the informant?*

You have to formulate the questions in such a way that the informant understands what you mean. It is good to prepare a question list for your interview, to give you focus and inspiration during the interview. But try to avoid being pinned down to the questions on the list. Be prepared to take a different path of questioning if during the interview this turns out to be interesting, logical or necessary. You can always come back to your question list.

3. Prepare the order in which you want to ask the various questions.

Start with general – non–threatening – questions about the person you are interviewing (e.g. age, background). Then proceed to more personal questions about the context of the issue you want to discuss. It is useful to think of indirect ways or topics that can lead you to more sensitive themes. Remember that people rather talk about good things than bad things. Therefore it is important that you always include questions that inquire about more negative things, as people might not voluntarily share this information with you. You may have to encourage them.

4. Prepare your introduction

In your introduction, you will explain to the informant:

- who you are
- what the research is about
- how you are going to guarantee **anonymity** and **confidentiality**
- how you are going to use the information given by him/her and why you need his/her **informed consent**
- that the informant can withdraw his/her participation in the research, at any point during the interview or research process and without having to give an explanation

Anonymity is ensuring that no one will be able to find out who the person was that provided this particular information.

Confidentiality is ensuring that the personal information that the informant provides will not be shared with others if the informant does not want to, or that the information will be shared, but the informant be kept anonymous, so that no one can relate the personal information to this particular informant.

Consent is permission that the informant gives to ask him/her questions and to use this information for the research/M&E, but this permission needs to be based on informed choice. So the informant needs to know what he or she is giving permission to. That is why we call it informed consent.

Guaranteeing anonymity, confidentiality and acquiring consent is part of the **ethical conduct** of a researcher. Ethical conduct means that a researcher vows to never do anything that can harm the informant and will continuously monitor the well-being of the informant throughout the research process. Ethical conduct is based on obeying to the human rights, in particular the right to full and complete information, the right to privacy and the right to integrity. It is therefore important to let the informant know that he or she can always withdraw his or her participation in the research and without having to give an explanation. Guaranteeing confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw to your informant helps you to get the informant's informed consent and to make him/her feel at ease, to trust you and to reveal more honest and/or personal information.

You should always start with the introduction, before asking interview questions. But you should continuously check if the person is still okay with the interview, as someone can change his/her mind about wanting to participate, if the questions become more personal or 'difficult'.

5. Prepare yourself

Be prepared for the questions the informants might ask you. In principle you can prepare yourself for this by imagining to be asked the questions that you pose. So, how would you yourself answer your own questions? The informant might expect you to have knowledge on these themes and might ask for your

Preparation steps for conducting an interview

1. Formulate a research question
2. Formulate sub-questions
3. Prepare the order of questions
4. Prepare your introduction
5. Prepare yourself
6. Organize logistics

advice or opinions. It is good to be prepared for this. But do not volunteer such information, remember it should be the informant who does the talking, not you! (see below, in 3.3).

6. Organize logistics

Make an appointment for a time and a place that are convenient for you and the informant(s). Take all the necessary arrangements with regard to your equipment and instruct your research assistants if you have them (note-takers etc.). Think about giving your informants an incentive/present as to compensate for their time and help – but also consider how this might influence the kind of data they give to you!

3.3 Interview techniques: Good ways to conduct an interview

3.3.1 CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT

Is is necessary to encourage people to open up and honestly express their experiences and opinions. Remember, people often do not like to say something negative, because they want you to like them, or they may be embarrassed or ashamed to talk about something personal, or about issues relating to sex and sexuality. A core interview technique is to create a conducive environment for making the informant(s) feel at ease and talking openly and honestly about sex and sexuality. There are some tips on how to create such an environment:

Tips for creating a conducive environment for interviewing

- Create a comfortable and private setting
- Introduce yourself and the research properly
- Try to build rapport and show respect
- Address sensitive topics in a sensitive way
- Use open-ended questions and avoid leading questions

These tips are further elaborated in the following sub-paragraphs.

3.3.2 SETTING

Make sure you conduct the interview in a place where your informant feels at ease. It is often good that no other persons can hear what is being said, to guarantee confidentiality and to minimize distraction. But some people might prefer a place where it is a bit more busy, because they are uncomfortable to be alone with you. If you are interviewing children, or youth younger than 18, it is generally best to choose a place where others can see, but not hear you.

3.3.3 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned above, it is important to explain your research and to ask for consent. The introduction is a good start to make your informant feel at ease. Encourage the informant to ask questions to you.

3.3.4 RAPPORT AND RESPECT

The word 'rapport' refers to the connection that exists between you and your informant. It comes from the French language and literally means '*to be on good terms with*'. If you have a good rapport with your informant, the informant is at ease with you and finds that he/she can relate with you, trust you and share information with you. There are several verbal and non-verbal communication skills that can increase the rapport that you can build with your informants.

Here are some of the most important tips:

- **The most important one: Don't judge!** Stay neutral. Do not volunteer your opinion unless it suits the interview purpose or unless the informant asks you for your opinion. Don't talk about yourself unless there is a good reason. Remember that in this role you are a researcher and not an educator, implementer or service provider!
- **Power disparity.** Treat the informant as the expert. He/she is the one who knows best about her/his live and experiences, even if he/she is younger, uneducated, etc. Make sure you show this respect so the informant feels you take her/him seriously. Dress appropriately, not too shabby but also not too 'superior'.
- **Listen.** A common mistake is to be thinking about the next question while the subject is answering the previous one, to the point that the interviewer misses some important information. This can give the informant the idea that you are not really interested or it may even lead to embarrassing situations.
- **Show genuine interest.** Even if this is the 20th interview and you get bored, show attention. Getting bored because you hear the same answers is good! It means saturation, it means the answer counts for many people and you can generalize it.
- **Be ethical.** First do no harm. Do not involve the informant if this can have negative consequences for him/her. Do not lie. If someone asks for your help or advice and you cannot give it yourself, refer to a colleague or specialist. If you feel uncomfortable discussing something, you should indicate your boundaries, explain to the informant and discontinue the interview – or ask a colleague to take over.
- **Don't interrupt.** This can upset the subject's train of thought and is not very respectful.
- **Be clear.** Ask questions clearly and use language and words that the informant uses him/herself and can understand. Also, if you are not sure you understand the informant or his/her answer, ask for clarification.
- **Use the correct tone of voice.** Ask gently, be friendly. Do not move from one question to the other, it might make the interview feel like an interrogation. It is good to allow for a few seconds of silence, so the informant can add anything if he/she wants.
- **Show empathy.** Often you will need to cover sensitive or distressing topics. Show some compassion for the subject without getting too emotional. You can do this by saying something like: "I can imagine this was hard for you". Ask for permission before asking difficult questions, for example: "Is it okay to talk about ...?" or "I can imagine it is difficult to talk about …".
- **Summarize the main points.** If you got something wrong, or if you are not sure about something, this is the moment for last corrections. You can introduce this by saying: "So if I understood you correctly …".
- **Have an informal chat** after you have finished the interview and put your notebook or recorder away. As well as being polite and leaving a good impression, you might be surprised at what additional information comes up when the subject thinks the interview is over and is more relaxed.

You will discover that all techniques boil down to the basic rule of having and showing 'respect' for the person who is providing you with information.

3.3.5 SENSITIVE THEMES

If a topic comes up that the informant finds very difficult to talk about, you might want to try the technique of **generalization/hypothesizing**. Make it less personal by coming up with an example of a situation and ask the informant what he/she would do/think/feel in such a situation. Or ask a question not directly, but in general, for example: *"In this area/village, do you think women can talk about condom use with their husbands?"* And if you feel that the interview is going alright and the informant trusts you: *"How is that for you?"*

Sometimes tensions and shame can be reduced by directly addressing the tension or embarrassment – for example by saying: *"I can understand you might feel a bit embarrassed to talk about this"* and then encourage the informant by stressing how important the information is for you, that it is not embarrassing for you to hear these things and by emphasizing confidentiality. But how you go about it depends very much on the culture, setting and individual(s) you are working with, so be careful!

3.3.6 OPEN-ENDED VERSUS CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

Another important tip for conducting a good interview, is to make use of **open-ended questions** instead of **closed-ended questions**. A closed-ended question can only be answered with yes or no, or another short or single-worded answer. Examples of closed-ended questions are: *"Have you been to a clinic?" "Did you like it?"*

Open-ended questions
These kind of questions typically begin with words such as why and how, or phrases such as *"Tell me about..."*.

Closed-ended questions can be useful and can be followed by open-ended questions, like why or when? But they are tricky in the sense that they have a tendency to be leading. A **leading question** is a question that subtly prompts the respondent to answer in a particular way. For example, in the question above, asking *"Did you like it?"* may lead people to say something positive, or something they think you want to hear, in this case: yes. Leading questions mirror what you want to hear and therefore the answers you get are more prone to be biased. Open-ended questions on the other hand, are designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the subject's own knowledge and/or feelings. They tend to be more objective and less leading than closed-ended questions.

For example, a closed-ended way of asking an informant about his/her relationship with his/her boss is: *"Do you get on with your boss?"* A better alternative is to ask: *"Tell me about the relationship with your boss."* Especially if there is a power difference between you and the informant (the informant is younger, female, illiterate, poor, another caste, etc.), the informant will be more susceptible to leading questions, which will bias your data.

Examples of closed- and open-ended questions can be found in Box 4.

BOX 4: CLOSED- VERSUS OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

CLOSED-ENDED QUESTION	OPEN-ENDED QUESTION
Do you think the information brochure is good?	What do you think about the information brochure?
Is the service provider friendly?	Can you tell me about your visit to the clinic/service?
Did you find the meeting useful?	How did you like the meeting? What did you think of the meeting?
Did you learn from the peer educator?	Where did you learn this? What did the peer educator talk about? Did you learn anything interesting?

3.3.7 ENTRY POINTS AND PROBING

Because one of the aims of an interview is to get a better understanding of (sexual) behaviour, it is good to ask questions that can provide you with information on meanings, feelings and reasons. It is therefore important to recognize 'entry points' and to 'probe'.

Entry points are answers, remarks or information that the informant is giving you that provide you with an opportunity to ask more in-depth questions, to find out more.

The good thing about entry points is that you do not have to introduce a topic or question, but that you make use of something the informant has said. An entry point is inviting you to ask more personal questions. Entry points can be followed by probing questions.

Probing questions are questions about motivation, opinion, reasons, believes, feelings – often they are 'why' questions.

The following is part of a literal transcription of a focus group discussion with secondary school students (the FGD can be seen as an interview with more than one informant).

See if you can find the entry points and formulate probing questions that help you to get in-depth information that is relevant for your question or indicator. In this case: (What is) the effect of peer education sessions.

Question:	I want to ask you about peer education sessions. If a boy teases a girl, can she ask for help?
Girl 1:	The girl can maybe not complain, because they may not believe her.
Girl 2:	The girl should not tell her parents.
Girl 3:	She should tell the boy first. If this does not help, she tells the parents.
Boys:	Yes, yes.
Question:	Do you share what you learn in the peer education session with others?
Girl:	I will share but I decide what to share and what not to share, to keep my friendship.
Question:	Are there issues in the peer education session that you use in your life?
Boy 1:	We might have gone to bad tracks.
Boy 2:	We boys smoke etc. – we learn and we quit. We learn to quit bad things. There was no power to decide, now we know. Now the path is shown and we will decide.
Boy 1:	We try to follow, but not always.

In this part, the entry points have been made **bold**, and probing questions have been added in *italics*.

Researcher:	I want to ask you about peer education sessions. If a boy teases a girl, can she ask for help?
Girl 1:	The girl can maybe not complain, **because they may not believe her.**
Girl 2:	The girl should **not tell her parents.**
Girl 3:	She should **tell the boy first.** If this does not help, she tells the parents.
Boys:	Yes, yes.
Probing Q ►	*Why would they not believe her? What would happen if she complains?*
	Why should she not tell her parents? What would happen if she did?
	Why should she tell the boy first? How would he react?
	Do others think the same? Does this count for all/most girls? How does that make you feel? (ask boys and girls and learn about gender inequity and attitudes!)
Researcher:	Do you share what you learn in the peer education session with others?
Girl:	I will share but I decide what to share and what not to share, **to keep my friendship**.
Probing Q ►	*Why would sharing what you learn in the peer education sessions affect your friendship? What particular information would be difficult to share? Did you try this/do you have experience with loosing a friendship because of this? Does this also count for boys?*
Researcher:	Are there issues in the peer education session that you use in your life?
Boy 1:	We might have **gone to bad tracks**.
Boy 2:	We boys smoke etc. – we learn and we quit. We learn to quit bad things. There was **no power to decide**, now we know. Now the path is shown and we will decide.
Boy 1:	We try to follow, **but not always**.
Probing Q ►	*What do you mean by bad tracks? Can you give other examples than smoking? How does the peer education session give you power to decide? What path is shown? When is it difficult to follow? Can you explain?*

To prevent asking too many 'why' questions and making it sound like an interrogation, you can ask questions like: *"can you explain?"*, *"how does that work?"*, *"how does that make you feel?"*, *"what is your experience with this?"*, *"what do you think of this?"* etc. Sometimes you can repeat a sentence of the informant in a questioning manner instead of asking a 'why' question. For example: *"You said you think he does not want to use condoms?"*

Asking if an answer, remark or opinion is shared by others (*"Does this also count for boys/girls?"*) gives you an opportunity to see if something counts for many people, or just for an individual and whether there are differences between boys and girls. This is important to do, especially if you want to be able to draw conclusions and/or want to be able to generalize (see chapter 5).

3.4 After finishing the interview

When you have finished the interview, it is advisable to work out your notes immediately, or as soon as possible, when the information is still fresh in your memory and you can still read/understand your notes!

Write down on top of the report sheet:

- the date
- name of the informant if you have it – if not, think of an alias
- age
- gender
- location

Then, write down:

- The main questions with the main answers (in a summary kind of way)
- Your main impressions: what did you find most remarkable or interesting (for example something that is new to you, something that is conflicting with information from others, or confirming what others have said)
- Your own ideas and thoughts (e.g. explanations, ideas, conclusions)
- How the interview went and your impression of the 'trustworthiness' of the informant. You can use the questions below to check the quality of your data (see also paragraph 5.2):
  - *How much consensus is there on a particular topic or explanation?*
  - *Does the answer/conclusion count for both boys and girls?*
  - *Which topics did you collect conflicting data on?*
  - *Are the data based on the informants' own observations, experiences, or is it hearsay?*
  - *How do you assess the overall 'honesty' of the informants (with regard to specific topics)*
  - *Did you check/verify your main findings and conclusions with some informants?*

Answering these questions will help to formulate new questions for the following interviews and bring focus, efficiency and quality to the data collection. Answering these questions directly after the interview or FGD will later help you with ordering and analysing your data.

Chapter 4: Focus group discussion: Tips and techniques

4.1 Introduction

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a discussion with a group of informants, normally around 5–15 people, guided by a facilitator. Frequently the participants of the FGD belong to the same group (e.g. gender, location, background, issue, age), but sometimes an FGD is used as a method of exploring differences between groups. Two or more groups (for example a group of men and a group of women, or a group of young people and a group of adults) may try to convince each other of their viewpoints. The FGD then takes the shape of a debate and can provide insight into gender and/or generational relationships and issues. The facilitator, sometimes the researcher him/herself, introduces topics and chooses who may speak. Often the topics, themes or questions that are raised are prepared beforehand, but they may also come up during the discussion. A second person (or even a few persons) assisting the research, will not partake in the discussion but make notes and write down observations. Another person may be taking pictures or film the discussion, if there is consent from the participants.

4.2 Good ways to conduct an FGD

Many of the tips and suggestions that were offered for conducting a good interview also count for conducting a good focus group discussion. In a way, a focus group discussion is like having an interview, but with more than one informant. However, there are some differences. The main difference between an FGD and an interview is that you have to work with a group instead of an individual. Therefore, it is important to:

- prepare your FGD well
- be aware of some particular challenges that can arise during FGDs

4.3 Preparing an FGD

Similar to preparing an interview you would prepare an FGD by identifying your main objective and formulating this into your main question. Then you divide this into sub-questions which you order in the form of a question list. The difference with an interview, however, is that because there are more people involved, you can ask less questions and you can ask less personal questions. Furthermore, FGDs are often organized to get information on opinions or attitudes, or to verify insights you gained from interviews. So this will be reflected in the kind of questions you formulate. Sometimes the questions can be phrased in the form of statements.

Next to preparing the questions, you have to prepare how you are going to organize the FGD. An FGD is hard work and it is difficult for one person to be the facilitator (the one who asks the questions and manages the FGD) and to make notes at the same time. It is advisable to conduct an FGD with at least two and preferably three or four persons (depending on how big the group is). One person should be the facilitator, the one in charge of the FGD. Another

person should be the data recorder, the one making notes on what is being said (especially if you are not taping the discussions). In addition, it can be wise to have a second FGD facilitator, to help the main facilitator with asking questions, or as a back-up. It is also good to have an observer present, a person who does not speak, but writes down his observations and ideas on for instance: were the informants at ease, who spoke most, who spoke least, what barriers were there, how did they respond to certain questions, what could the facilitator do to improve the FGD next time? The observer could also ask some evaluative questions on how the informants liked the FGD after the discussion has finished. During the preparations it is important to make a clear division of tasks so that everyone knows his/her role and responsibility when the FGD is conducted.

Logistically, the preparation of an FGD takes more effort than that of an interview. You have to arrange a date that all the participants are available and a place that all the participants can reach. The place needs to be 'free of distractions'. Sometimes you have to offer the participants compensation for their time or transportation costs. Therefore FGDs are frequently more costly than interviews.

4.4 Specific challenges of an FGD

To conduct a successful FGD, the facilitator has to pay attention to group processes and to manage these. In a group, more people might want to share their ideas or opinions and the facilitator has to make sure that the people will not talk all at once or become annoyed that they do not get enough space to share their ideas. Some important group management aspects:

- Talking one by one
- Manage 'the talker' and 'the silent one'
- Time management
- Keep the group focused and provide structure
- Setting

Because you are working with a group, you might be conducting the FGD with a colleague or with a team. This team needs to be managed as well, at the same time as the focus group. It helps if:

- You have made a clear division of tasks so that everyone has a clear role
- There are no conflicting messages between you and others from the team
- There are no internal discussions
- You have made good preparations and clear objectives

Chapter 5: Drawing good conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The goal of M&E is to demonstrate the changes that have been achieved by the project. Research helps to collect data on changes and the factors that enabled or limited the change that you wanted to achieve. When you report on the progress of the project, you write down the change that has been achieved in relation to the project objectives. But how do you know that the change you are describing has really taken place and is not just somebody's opinion? And how can you convince others that this change has really been achieved by your project? This chapter will explain how you can do this.

5.2 Validity and reliability of data

The extent to which the collected data gives a 'true' picture of what is being studied is called 'validity'.

Your research data is called 'reliable' if the results/answers would be similar, if the research was to be repeated (by yourself or another researcher).

If you pose your research questions to only one person, the answer that this person gives you might not necessarily reflect the truth. A different person might have given you a completely different answer. If you ask more people the same question, and these people give the same answer, it becomes more likely that this answer is reflecting the truth. This is what we call **validity**. When more people agree, the answer is more valid. If more people agree, independent from each other (e.g. in different settings, in different interviews or discussions) the answer becomes more valid.

If you ask a person your research question, this person can give you a different answer than if someone else had asked this question. If an informant gives different answers to the same question, we say the answers are not very **reliable**. This can be because the informant him/herself is not very trustworthy or because of the influence of the researcher him/herself.

Before drawing conclusions, it is therefore important to ask some questions regarding the trustworthiness of the answers (data) that you have collected. The questions below are important to ask yourself when collecting data.

Steps to check the validity and reliability of your data

1. How much consensus is there on a particular topic or explanation?
2. Which topics did I collect conflicting data on?
3. Does the answer/conclusion count for boys and girls?
4. Are the data based on the informants own observations, experiences, or is it hearsay?
5. What do you think of the overall 'honesty' of the informants (with regard to specific topics)
6. Are the main findings and conclusions verified with some informants?
7. Would the answers be different if you had been male/female, older/younger, had interviewed the informants in a different setting (e.g. in their homes instead of the clinic)?

5.3 Drawing a good conclusion

A conclusion is an answer to a question. In this case, to your **research question**. Because research questions in M&E are always related to the project objectives, a conclusion tells others what the project has achieved on this particular objective. But simply stating that the project has, for instance, improved access to contraceptives, is not enough. People will not believe this, unless you provide arguments, or evidence (proof). Therefore, a good conclusion gives an answer to the (research) question but also explains the relationship between the cause (the project strategies and activities) and the effect (what you have achieved, your conclusion). So a good conclusion explains how an effect has been achieved.

In order to convince the reader or listener, it is good if you can show that your conclusion is not just your opinion, but the opinion of people from the target group. It helps if you can show this, for example by quoting some of your informants, or by mentioning figures.

Your arguments and conclusion become stronger, if people believe that you are honest and objective. It is therefore good to include descriptions of the limitations of your findings and negative factors, things that did not work. This also shows to others that you are capable of learning. **Limitations** are the questions that your research did not answer, because you had only a few informants, or only limited time. You also have to report limitations with regard to the reliability and validity of your data. Remember: all research has its limitations and there are always factors that limit a result or effect. If you do not mention them, people will become suspicious and you will loose credibility.

If you check for the following steps when you are drawing a conclusion, you should be able to formulate strong and convincing conclusions.

A good conclusion:

- gives an answer to the question, and a short explanation of why and how
- is logical (the relationship between cause and effect is clear)
- is complete and reflexive:
  - > It includes a focus on the positive as well as on the negative
  - > It includes information on what is not found (e.g. no stories of safer sex)
  - > Is based on strong arguments which in turn are based on sufficient and truthful data
  - > If not, or if weak, the conclusion should include a reflection on the limitations of the research and the validity and reliability of the data, or the conclusion is preceded by such a reflection
- includes recommendations, or is followed by a paragraph that formulates recommendations

Chapter 6: Learning

6.1 Importance of learning

The reason you are undertaking your project activities is because you want to achieve something. What you want to achieve, is formulated in your project objectives. The purpose of conducting M&E is to be able to monitor and evaluate results and progress. You want to evaluate how you are doing, if you are achieving your objectives. The steps described in the previous chapters help you to analyze and reflect on how well the project is doing: your **effectiveness** and **efficiency**. Through analysis, you think about the reasons why something is going well, or not going well. Analysis and reflection – on positive factors that contribute towards achieving your objectives and on negative factors that form a barrier towards achieving this – are crucial steps towards drawing a conclusion, and towards learning from your experiences and improving your strategies and activities in order to achieve your objectives.

6.2 Steps in learning: Good practices and lessons learned

Good/best practices
Strategies and activities for which you have evidence that they are sound and which you think can work in other contexts too.

Lessons learned
Knowledge and insight that is gained through analyzing barriers and challenges that impede you from reaching your objectives.

The steps involved in learning, are similar to the steps you take during data analysis and drawing conclusions. You have to answer the following questions:

1. *What did the project want to achieve?* ➔ Objectives, targets
2. *What has actually happened?* ➔ Results, output and outcome
3. *What were the positive factors?* ➔ Explanation of why and how results were achieved
4. *What were the negative factors?* ➔ Explanation of why and how results were not (yet) achieved

When you answer questions 2, 3 and 4, make it a habit to relate the questions and answers to the four important elements described in paragraph 1.3:

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Sustainability

If you have answered these questions, you should come to a conclusion on what works well: the strategies and activities that are sound and help you to reach your objective. This is normally referred to with the term **'good practices'** or **'best practices'**. You should also come to a conclusion on what does not work and why not. This is normally referred to with the term **'lessons learned'**, although this term is sometimes used interchangeably with good practices. For clarity we use lessons learned in regard to the knowledge and insight that is gained through analyzing barriers and challenges.

6.3 Applying lessons learned and good practices: Formulating recommendations

If you know that something is going well, that a certain strategy or activity leads to good results, it is logical to continue with these practices and to share them with others. It can also be wise to invest more effort, money, time and resources in these practices because they pay off. If you think that continuation with or investment in expanding these practices (sometimes called 'scaling up') increases your project's effectiveness, efficiency, relevance or sustainability, you should formulate this in the form of **recommendations**. If you have analysed setbacks and barriers and understand why something is not working (well), you (and/or others) might have ideas on how to improve this. Two people know more than one, so you should always have a brainstorm with a group of people (including young people!) on your analysis and conclusions about setbacks and barriers. Together you can discuss which strategies, activities and changes you can develop in order to address the barriers, avoid repetition of mistakes or try out something new. Again, you formulate this in the form of recommendations.

Recommendations

Advice on how to improve a project's effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and/or sustainability, formulated on basis of conclusions, good practices and/or lessons learned.

Examples of recommendations following an FGD with peer educators

- Working with young people as researchers has positive effects on the validity of the data and it is recommended to continue involving young researchers in the data collection. (Good practice)
- It is also advisable to organize FGDs with peer educators to further explore the barriers they face in their work as peer educators and to investigate possible solutions. (Good practice – the researchers learned that FGDs help to explore barriers and solutions)
- In particular, it is recommended that the peer educators receive more support from the project team and the clinical staff in order to guarantee complete and correct information to the young people of the target group. (Lesson learned)

6.4 Ensuring the process of learning in a project

There are numerous theories on how organizations learn. To be a learning organization, it is important to have a shared vision on learning as organization, and there needs to be a willingness to invest in learning. Experiences teaches us that learning is often the first to suffer in times of pressure or stress. Operational urgencies will generally get priority over learning, even when learning is considered important. To prevent this from happening, it is important to plan learning and reflexion, and at fixed times make time to take a step back and reflect on your programme.

Besides the allocation of time, it is important to have a specific budget allocated for learning, which enables you to implement innovative learning methodologies and share learning with as much as possible relevant people.

To make people interested in learning, it is important to demonstrate the benefits of learning, what people and organizations can gain from it. It might be helpful to come up with a shared vision on learning before the projects starts, which determines on what issues learning is required, and how the learning processes take place.

It is important to realise that to learn, one needs to be open, reflective and critical towards the programme, results, and sometimes to one selves. If the organizational culture is not safe and/or penalizes mistakes, learning is not very likely to happen. Likewise, if the programme's management (or donor) is not flexible, and alternations to the project are not allowed, learning will be jeopardized. Learning is only useful, if lessons learned can be implemented and strengthen the programme.

Chapter 7: Why reporting is important

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter we give suggestions on important qualitative elements that are essential to be reported and should not be missed when writing a report.

The most important reason for writing a report is to inform others on the results and progress of your project. The most important reasons why you want to inform others on your results and progress are:

- Learning
- Justification
- Support

7.2 Reporting for learning

The previous chapter explained the importance of learning and the steps in learning. In your report, you have to report on these steps:

- *What did the project want to achieve?*
- *What has actually happened?*
- *What were the positive factors?*
- *What were the negative factors?*

Writing these questions and answers down, helps you:

- to improve the project (in terms of effectiveness and efficiency)
- to plan ahead (budgeting, targets, activities, resources, time management)
- to help others understand why it is necessary to make changes (in your strategies, in your planning)
- to communicate your insights to others, so that they can learn from them

It is important for others to learn from your insights especially in case you or one of your colleagues leaves the project or when someone new joins the team. Through reporting, the knowledge and insight of the project staff will not get lost when they leave and new staff will not have to start from scratch. What is learned is not kept to one or a few individuals, but embedded in the organization. Other staff from your organization (and other organizations) who are involved in other projects can also learn from your insights if you share them with them. This is what we call **organizational learning**. Good reports help to share and transfer knowledge and insights in an efficient way.

7.3 Reporting for justification and accountability

Showing your results and progress through reporting helps other people, including donors, gatekeepers and target groups, to understand why you are doing what you are doing, your successes and setbacks, why you are making changes and why and how money is spend. A report helps you to **justify** your **work, actions, changes** and **expenditures** to others. Good reporting helps you to increase your transparency; others can understand why you are for instance spending a certain amount of money on something, why you deploy a certain strategy, or why you are delayed. Good reporting therefore can help you to obtain **support**.

7.4 Reporting for creating support

A good report makes insightful (transparent) what you want to achieve, what you are achieving and what you do to increase your effectiveness and efficiency. If others understand your actions, decisions and expenditure they will be more likely to support you. The aspect of sustainability is very important in this matter. This counts for all stakeholders involved in your project: the target groups, the communities and gatekeepers, your team, your organization and your donor(s). People will be more likely to support you (financially and otherwise) if they can follow your process, and if they assess it positively. An important element in the trust people put in a program, is whether they see that you are **learning, adapting, improving**. This is one of the most important reasons why it is important to write about challenges, limitations and setbacks, even (and especially) in reports to donors. People, including donors, rather support someone who shows he/she is realising there are challenges, or problems in achieving a certain objective or using a certain strategy, and make adaptations, than someone who pretends that all is going well. Such a person will lose credibility and people will lose confidence in this person. While someone who is transparent will be viewed as a realistic, honest, professional and trustworthy person.

You may have noticed how the four important elements in M&E, Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability (discussed in paragraph 1.3) are all covered in the above description.

Chapter 8: Developing an M&E plan

8.1 Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation plans describe the design of monitoring and evaluation in your programme. The M&E plan can be used as a guide towards your monitoring activities, with a detailed description of the different monitoring or evaluation steps that need to be taken to show progress and results towards your goals, and to learn from these.

8.2 What could be included in an M&E plan?

We have identified five elements that should be described in your M&E plan:

- **The scope of your monitoring and evaluation**

  This has a one-on-one relationship with your programme, as it specifies goals and objectives, the theory of change and the related results (activities, outputs, outcomes, impact) and respective (SMART) indicators

- **Your monitoring and evaluation approach**

  This includes a description of the selected methodologies chosen to measure progress on the indicators and the processes related to these. Besides data collection methodologies and sources, it is important to specify your data analysis methodology, and the reporting systems. The description of important monitoring milestones, (for example baselines, mid-term evaluation, final evaluation) will provide you with a comprehensive overview of your ambitions. Lastly, additional (intervention) research or specific learning questions related to the programme, linking these questions to your M&E approach.

- **Your monitoring and evaluation operational plan**

  This includes a clear description of M&E activities based on the selected methodologies (what needs to be done), the roles and responsibilities (who is doing what), planning (where and when will data be collected, when will data be analysed, when will reports be ready) and budget. This also requires an answer to the issue of available knowledge, skills and capacity within your organization, and the possible need to include external support.

- **How you intend to use the results.**

  This describes how the programmatic findings and insights will be used for steering the programme, learning, and adapting the programme. It will describe the processes in place that enable learning, for example through learning meetings, online discussion or exchange visits. It will also describe how the insights can be used to, if needed, adjustments to the programme, for example by incorporating monitoring results in planning meetings, and the existence of a learning culture.

- **How you will disseminate the programmatic findings**

  This describes who needs to receive the results, including upward and downward accountability, and whether results need to be translated in other forms to be understandable and useful for the different stakeholders

8.3 Who should be involved in development of the M&E plan?

The M&E plan can only be made if the questions that need to be answered through monitoring and evaluation are clearly stated. These questions need to be relevant for the organization, and for the donor involved. Therefore, it is advisable that these information needs are being decided upon with a team consisting of different staff positions within the organization, including decision makers within the organizations, programme officers, thematic experts and PME experts.

It is likely you will encounter barriers to be able to conduct monitoring and evaluation efforts. If you have identified these with the above described team, it will be easier to come up with strategies and solutions. This will support ownership for the PME work within the organisation.

As contexts and as such (effects of your) programs might change, it is wise to regularly assess your M&E plan, and adapt the plan where needed. Adaptation could be concerning the indicators (did we select the relevant indicators?), the methodologies (are we able to get sufficient data to inform the indicator?), the implementation (is monitoring implemented as planned and is the relevant staff involved in monitoring?), the use (are the lessons learned from monitoring used in our work?) or dissemination (do all stakeholders receive the information in an appropriate manner).

Annex A: Glossary of terms related to M&E and research

Anonymity	Insurance that no one will be able to find out who the person was that provided this particular information.
Closed-ended question	A question that can only be answered with yes or no, or another short or single-worded answer. Closed-ended questions have a risk to be leading, to prompt the respondent to answer in a particular way.
Confidentiality	Insurance that the personal information that the informant provides will not be shared with others if the informant does not want to.
Consent	Permission of the informant to ask him/her questions and to use the answers for the research/M&E. The informant needs to know what he or she is giving permission to in order to make an informed choice. That is why we call it informed consent.
Data	The information that helps to find an answer to the question.
Data analysis	The process that leads to answering the research question.
Data collection method	A particular way of finding answers to the research question.
Data source	A source that can provide you with information that informs your indicator/ answers your question(s).
Efficiency	The extent to which the input (time, money, resources) into the work is appropriate in terms of the output
Effectiveness	The extent to which the objectives are achieved; whether activities have actually contributed towards the changes that were expected to occur
Entry points	Answers, remarks or information that the informant is giving you that provide you with an opportunity to ask more 'in-depth' questions, to find out more.
Ethical conduct	The way a researcher conducts his or her research in line with obeying human rights and the ethical principles: the informant's right to complete and correct information, the right to privacy and the right to integrity.
Evaluation	A periodic assessment of how things are done and if we are achieving what we set out to achieve.
Indicator	The measure that is used to assess if an objective has been achieved or what progress has been made.
Informant	A person that provides you with information (data) that can help you to answer the research question.
Means of verification (MoV)	Describe how the project will verify whether the outcomes or outputs have been achieved.
Monitoring	The continuous process which ensures that the activities are carried out according to plan – in terms of content, time and costs.
Open-ended question	A question that invites the informant to give an elaborate answer. Open-ended questions typically begin with words such as 'why' and 'how', or phrases such as "Tell me about..."

Output	Activity-based: directly observable products, processes or results of activities. An output indicator measures the direct outputs of activities and is mostly quantitative: indicating numbers.
Outcome	Result-based: Outcomes are descriptions of the results of the activities, in terms of achievement of the objectives. Outcome indicators measure actual benefits or changes resulting from your activities.
Probing question	Questions about motivation, opinion, reasons, believes, feelings – often 'why', 'how', or 'can you explain...' questions.
Proxy indicator	Indirect measurement or sign that represents a change.
Qualitative	Relating to descriptions that tell how people feel about certain issues, how people behave or how things are done.
Quantitative	Relating to numbers or percentages that tell you how much or how many.
Rapport	The quality of the relationship between the researcher and the informant and the degree to which they relate with each other, feel at ease, trust each other and share information in an open and honest way.
Relevance	The extent to which the objectives of the project/intervention are (still) consistent with the (beneficiaries') needs and situation (the physical and policy environment)
Reliability	The extent to which the collected data would be similar when the research would be repeated (by yourself or by another researcher).
Research	A study or investigation with the aim to find new information or reach a new understanding about a certain topic. Research is an organized and systematic way of finding answers to questions.
Research population	The group of informants that you have selected to participate in the research.
Sampling	Refers to the way you select the (number and type of) informants for your research.
SMART (indicators)	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound (indicators).
Sustainability	The likelihood whether results/changes resulting from the intervention will be maintained (after the project)
Validity	The extent to which the collected data gives a 'true' picture of that what is studied.

Annex B: Example of a data collection plan

EXAMPLE MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN CSE PROGRAMME IN COUNTRY X								
OBJECTIVES		**ACTIVITIES**	**INDICATORS**	**MEANS OF VERIFICATION**	**WHERE (SAMPLE)**	**RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S)**	**FREQUENCY**	**BUDGET AND TIME ALLOCATION FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**
Objective 1: Increasing SRHR knowledge of students in programme area	1.1	Teacher training	Outputs: 100 teachers trained	Training log books	All training held	District Programme officer	After each training	–
	1.2	School-based programme implemented in 50 schools	10,000 students reached (disaggregate)	School attendance sheets	All schools included in the programme	Teacher	After each lesson	–
			Outcomes: Increased knowledge of youth in programme	Pre and post test	Sample of two schools in each district, total of 10 schools out of 50	Teacher/district programme officer/PME officer	Before and after the curriculum	$xx (total, e.g. development questionnaire/ pre-test/Travel analysis)
Objective 2:	2.1							
	2.2							

Who we are

RUTGERS WPF

Rutgers WPF is a renowned expert centre on sexual and reproductive health and rights. We work towards a world in which all people are equally able to enjoy sexual and reproductive health and well-being, and exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. Central to our work is an open and positive attitude towards sexuality.

Rutgers WPF carries out activities in the Netherlands, Africa and Asia. Rutgers WPF supports partner organizations and professionals in their work, increasing their expertise on sexuality. Our activities are evidence-based, theoretically sound, culture and context sensitive, based on equality of gender, race, age and religion, and involve the participation of target groups.

Rutgers WPF evolved from the merger of the Rutgers Nisso Groep and the World Population Foundation (WPF). Rutgers WPF is a member of IPPF, the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

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