

ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA.

Qualitative data is information presented in words (or pictures), and can include information from interviews with a single person or a group, a case study, written feedback or other forms. It can be difficult to analyse and present in a way which is useful. The aim of this guidance is to present a simple way to analyse this type of information, so you can identify and share the key messages effectively¹.

Capturing qualitative data

In order to analyse qualitative data, you need to make sure it is captured **accurately** and **comprehensively**. This means that we cannot just analyse a summary of what people said during the interview or group discussion – we need a record of (as close as possible to) what they *actually said* – *including the actual words they used*. There are two ways of doing this.

1. The best way is to audio record the interview (e.g. using the voice recorder on your phone), with the permission of the respondent(s). This means that you capture everything that is said. However, you will need to create a written record of the interview in order to analyse it – and this can be time consuming. We will discuss this below.
2. A dedicated note-taker sits in on the interview or group discussion. This person does not take part in the discussion, but writes down everything that is said, as closely as possible. It will not be possible to capture everything, but a person who has been well-trained to take on this role will be able to write down the main points.

Immediately after the interview is over, the note-taker and the interviewer sit together and produce a ‘condensed transcript’ of the interview. This does not include every word that is said but includes all the important information, and uses the same words that the respondent used. It is essential that the condensed transcript is written immediately after each interview, and that both the note-taker and the interviewer are involved, so that parts which were not written down can be reconstructed from memory.

Whichever method you use, you should also make some notes immediately after each interview of any interesting or surprising issues that emerged, or any observations you made. These will help with your analysis later.

Getting the data ready for analysis

If you have created a condensed verbatim transcript, then your data is already ready for analysis. Congratulations!

If you audio recorded the interview or group discussion, then you will need to transcribe it into written form before you can analyse it. This involves listening to the recording and writing or typing exactly what is said. This is extremely time-consuming (it takes an estimated 6-7 hours to transcribe one hour of interview data). There are ways to speed up the process, and there are many paid options for transcribing data available. However, if you have access to Microsoft365, you can upload your recordings and Word will transcribe them for you. [This video](#) explains how. There may be other free programmes which do this as well.

If you use Microsoft Word or another automatic transcription method to transcribe your interview data, you still need to read through and correct it. Voice recognition software is not perfect, and often misses

¹ Other useful resources to support your data analysis include:

IFRC Psychosocial Centre Monitoring and evaluation framework for psychosocial support interventions (p25-28)
Inter-agency Guide to Evaluation of Psychosocial Programming in Emergencies (p107-115)

words or cannot understand certain accents, so you can find some surprising phrases appear in your transcript!

Analysing your data

Qualitative data analysis is a huge subject – I recommend that you don't do an internet search for it! There are many different methods and approaches, some of which are extremely complex. We don't need a complex method to analyse evaluation data, because we usually have just one or two very simple questions we want to answer. This is why it is important to be clear about the questions you want to answer before you start the analysis (ideally, before you start the data collection) – it keeps you focused and prevents things becoming more complicated than they need to be.

So we can leave the more complex ways of analysing qualitative data to the academics. We will be using a simple method called 'thematic analysis'. This is essentially about organising the data into themes, and then describing what respondents said about each theme. There are two ways to decide on the themes you will use to organise your data:

1. Read through the data and see what themes emerge. This approach is used when we don't know much about the issue we are interested in and want to learn about it from people with relevant information (e.g. people living in the affected community).

It can be useful during the assessment phase, when we often don't know much about the issue. It can be useful to ask some general questions (e.g. 'what are the main concerns of women living in this community?') and see what people say. We will then identify themes in their responses.

2. Decide on the themes in advance.

This approach can be useful for evaluation purposes, when we are assessing the extent to which the indicators have been achieved. This means that we already know what issues we want to find out about – the issues identified in the indicators will be our 'themes'.

Below, you will find a description of the process of conducting a simple thematic analysis. It can be conducted manually (with paper and pens) or electronically (using Excel, Word or special qualitative analysis software if you have access to it). You can watch a short video describing how thematic analysis can be done manually [here](#).

Steps

1. Read through your data until you know it well.
2. Decide on the 'codes' or 'themes' you are interested in. These could be the issues you've already identified in your indicators, or you could identify them after reading through the data.
3. Group together similar information under these themes/ codes.
4. Look for patterns within and between the themes.
5. Check your analysis if possible
6. Present your findings

DECIDING ON THEMES OR CODES

- A single interview provides a huge amount of data and you could spend weeks analysing the information in detail. That's why it is important to have a clear idea of the questions you want to answer – the indicators you want to find out about.
- Once you have answered your original questions, you can look at other ideas and themes that have emerged from your data.

ORGANISING YOUR INFORMATION/ DATA ACCORDING TO YOUR THEMES/ CODES

- Go through your data and pick out every piece of information relating to the themes/ codes you are interested in. To make it easier, you could work on one code at a time.
- Put all the information relating to a single code in one place (a table, a notebook, a separate Word document).

- Make sure you include information about who gave each piece of information (age, gender, etc) so you can look for differences between groups.

CHECK YOUR ANALYSIS IF POSSIBLE

It is important to ensure validity and reliability in the data analysis process. This is especially important with analysis of qualitative data analysis, because so much subjective judgement is involved in making decisions about themes and coding. You need to make sure, as much as possible, that your own expectations and assumptions don't influence the final results.

- Present your findings back to participants and ask whether this seems to reflect their experience. We will be looking at this more later in the unit.
and/ or
- Give someone else the codes and your data, and ask them to identify the information that relates to each code.

Reporting on your data

Start by making a summary of your findings and your themes.

If it is an evaluation project, then you will report your findings in relation to each indicator.

If it is an assessment, you might summarise your findings in relation to each theme you developed.

If there are differences between groups (e.g. adults, children), make this clear.

EXAMPLE

We will work through some simple qualitative data together, to illustrate this process in practice.

Imagine that you are conducting an evaluation for an organisation which has been conducting a capacity-building project with staff working in humanitarian settings in East Africa.

Two of their indicators are:

- Aid workers involved in the project are able to recognise their achievements
- Aid workers involved in the project feel they are learning new skills which help them in their work

We are going to analyse data from interviews with four staff together, using the steps described above.

STEP 1. READ THROUGH THE INTERVIEWS

You can find the interview transcripts in the annex to this guidance.

Read through them all. Make notes of anything that stands out to you as important or interesting.

STEP 2. DECIDE ON THEMES

Use your indicators to decide on the themes you want to focus on. In this case, there are two main themes:

1. Achievements identified
2. Skills acquired

STEP 3. ORGANISE YOUR INFORMATION/ DATA ACCORDING TO YOUR THEMES

Identify all the examples relating to the indicator you are focusing on.

You can do this manually, by:

- printing out the four interviews and highlighting the text relating to each theme in a different colour, or
- cutting up the interviews and organising the text into two piles, one for each indicator (if you do this, mark each piece of text to show which respondent it came from).

Or you can do it electronically, by creating a Word document for each indicator, and copying any text related to that indicator to the appropriate Word document. Make sure you also note which respondent each piece of text came from, as you copy it across.

Once you have finished coding your data (organising it into themes), then read through the information relating to each indicator and identify some key issues which emerge from the data. Look for things which are repeated by more than one interviewee, or ideas which come up more than once. Pick out anything which seems important to you.

STEP 4. PRESENT YOUR FINDINGS

Summarise your findings on each indicator in one paragraph.

You only have four people so can't really look for patterns, but if you have noticed any interesting differences between them, point this out in a second paragraph.

In Annex 2 you can see an example of a summary of the data analysis for each indicator. This is not the 'correct answer'! There are different ways to present this analysis, but I hope this example will help you to see how this type of data can be reported upon in a concise way, which makes the main findings clear but which also highlights any differences within the data.

EXAMPLE PAPER

In the Repository you can find an example of a MHPSS evaluation which used interview data and was published in the *Intervention* journal.

[Momartin, S., da Silva Miranda, E., Aroche, J., & Coello, M. \(2018\). Resilience building through alternative intervention: 'STARTTS "Project Bantu Capoeira Angola"' on the road to recovery. *Intervention*, 16\(2\),154-160.](#)

ANNEX 1. Example of interview data

EAST AFRICA AID WORKERS: Karameldin Adam, Child Development Foundation

SUDAN, Nyala, West Darfur

When people ask me why I do the job I do, I think of the challenges our children face every day. It still shocks me that 80% of our school-age kids don't go to school. Or that 50% of our youth today hasn't made it through education. We have 5000 street children; many of them sniff glue. Often, girls as young as 13 fall pregnant.

Many of these issues are linked to the civil war which has forced tens of thousands of people to leave their villages, and relocate to IDP camps. We work in five of them, providing education and psychosocial support; helping people to find a livelihood, promoting child rights and delivering skills training.

In 2011, we reached 30,000 people. And we're getting busier all the time. Why? Because we have built the capacity of our staff by investing in their skills. We have got better at managing our programmes and now work as a team so we're delivering better results and generating more funding.



These days we have to travel all over Darfur. Not long ago, while on our way to visit a project, we came face-to-face with a group of armed men on the road ahead. But rather than panicking or trying to speed past we knew exactly what to do.

We slowed down and stopped the car. We complied with all of the gunmen's requests and they let us go. It was NGO X's security training which saved our lives – and enables all of our staff to travel across Darfur to serve the people who rely on our services.

People like Mohamed Ali and his wife Zafra from Otash camp. Their five children are now all attending school thanks to CDF. This wasn't the case back in 2007. Mohamed and Zafra's kids worked in the local market as wheelbarrow pushers, taking people's shopping home and making 1SDG (24p) per day.

But, after many months of negotiation, CDF's social workers convinced Mohamed and his wife to send all five kids to school. Now, all of the Ali children are in full-time education. Mohamed has even started evening classes and is learning how to read and write. And he has joined the local child protection network, helping to advocate for children's rights, too.

EAST AFRICA AID WORKERS: Simenah Gebeyehu, National Water and Sanitation Officer, UNHCR

Jijiga, Eastern Ethiopia

I know how important my skills are when it comes to saving lives. I am based in Jijiga, Eastern Ethiopia. It's a challenging location as we're close to the border with Somalia and we work with refugees who have fled civil war, or been displaced by the recent food crisis.

I am responsible for water, sanitation and hygiene promotion in three refugee camps – Kebribeyah, Sheder and Awbare –home to more than 40,000 people. My job is to ensure people have clean, safe water to drink, and that they don't have to walk more than 200 metres to get it. I am also responsible for making sure there are enough sanitation facilities – such as toilets. Not to mention, helping people keep their jerry cans clean, as well as teaching hand-washing practices. It's always busy!



It would be even busier if a larger-scale emergency was to hit. Effective water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion are all so important during a major crisis: that's when the real life- saving work is done. Recently, my colleagues and I have been extending and updating our skills on two NGO X trainings. With the help of experienced water engineers, we have been assessing what we would do if we had a rapid influx of people to our camps.

We have learnt how to design boreholes so we can access more water from the ground. And how to select the correct pipes and use them effectively. Many of my colleagues learnt things they didn't know before, like water quality testing – and how much chlorine to add to dirty water to make it safe. Since then we have had some great results: we are all more confident when designing water supply systems, we have had decreased incidence of disease in the camps and water quality and volume has increased.

If you don't know how to do your job, particularly during a major disaster, you can create an emergency on top of an emergency. And if you're not doing your job properly, you're also wasting funds. That's not good for anyone.

EAST AFRICA AID WORKERS: Tom Ogol, WASH Engineer & Project Assistant, Norwegian Refugee Council

Dadaab, Northern Kenya

Here in the Dadaab region of Northern Kenya, we know only too well that the East Africa food crisis and drought is still far from over.

I work in a refugee camp called Ifo 2 and I've been here for nearly a year. It's a big place – there are 40,000 people and nearly half a million when you include surrounding camps. Even now, we have 1500 new arrivals each day.

The NRC is responsible for providing Water and Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) support. That means we do everything from ensuring people have access to clean water for drinking and showering, to activities like monitoring the effectiveness of our work, dealing with excreta disposal, and more.



I have learnt so many things in this role. One of them is that you can't just wake up and achieve your aims: you have to plan well, and budget well, especially as there are so many different organisations involved.

It's also important to make sure that everyone you work with has the latest skills, knowledge and training. That's why my colleagues and I recently completed two courses, one on a system to help us monitor and coordinate our activities (called the WASH 'monitoring system') and a second on technical skills. Both have helped us to deliver better quality services to more people.

Of course, you always sympathise with the people living in the camps when you see the conditions they live in. But as an aid worker, I am here to help people lead a more dignified life.

EAST AFRICA AID WORKERS: Ahmed Khamis Alnour, Education Supervisor

West Darfur, Sudan

We provide basic education services – like reading, writing and playtime – for children living in a local camp for internally displaced people called Alhujaj. The camp is home to about 5000 men, women and children, most of whom were forced to leave their villages in 2002 due to serious fighting and violence.

Life is tough for the families of Alhujaj. The camp is very crowded. People don't have tents but small homes made from bamboo sticks, sheets and grass. In winter, blankets are provided by aid organisations. And in the rainy season, plastic sheeting is available to keep the water off.

People are not happy living like this but they have no choice. They don't have enough to eat, or enough clothing – and the sanitation situation isn't good either. But they can't go back to their homes and villages because the security situation is still very bad.



Our work makes things a little better. We're the only school in the camp with just two teachers – and we teach about 70 children from Sunday to Thursday. We also tell the kids about proper hygiene, and how to be helpful and confident.

Although my job involves frequent visits to Alhujaj, it is also about helping to raise more money – and telling our donors about what we have achieved. This might not sound important, but it really is. We want to begin work in three other camps and expand our services so we can teach adults too.

To help me do this part of my job better, I went on a NGO X training to learn how to write better proposals and reports. It means I can provide the correct information to potential funders and report back on what we are doing in the right way. Since then, I have had lots of positive feedback and we are hopeful we will receive some new funding in the next couple of months.

Training is so important to develop the skills of national organisations like ours. We hope that GSDS and other Sudanese organisations will be able to take on more humanitarian projects in this region. By improving my skills, my work improves, and that means we can provide better services to the people of West Darfur.

Annex 2. Example summaries of the findings

Indicator 1: Aid workers involved in the project are able to recognise their achievements

Achievements which were particularly valued by the participants were improvements in quality and increases in the scale of their work. Participants described how they were able to reach more people, raise more money, extract more water from the ground, and generally deliver better quality services. The better quality services have led to improvements in the quality of people's lives (e.g. reduced disease) and behaviour change (e.g. parents agreeing to send their children to school). In addition, participants were better able to inform donors about their achievements, and so increase the likelihood of accessing funding.

Indicator 2: Aid workers involved in the project feel they are learning new skills which help them in their work

The skills learned through the capacity building programmes were greatly appreciated by the participants, and were clearly related to improvements in their work. Technical skills, such as proposal writing, borehole design and WASH monitoring led to direct service improvements such as increase in water quality and volume. In addition, participants said that the training had helped them to plan for the future, to manage their programmes better and to work more effectively as a team. One participant gave a dramatic example of how the security training provided by NGO X had saved the lives of several staff members, and had enabled staff who had participated in the training to travel across Darfur to serve people throughout the region.