



Researcher's Guide

to good practice in
Community Health
Research

Background



The Centre of Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Appropriate Technology Development (WASHTED) at the University of Malawi Polytechnic has been conducting research in Chikwawa for many years.

Our encounters with community members and district authorities during research revealed the need for researchers, district officials and community members to meet and discuss issues surrounding good research practice.

For this reason, WASHTED in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, SHARE consortium, National Commission of Science and Technology, University of Strathclyde and WaterSPOUTT consortium conducted a community dialogue on research in Chikwawa district with the following objectives:

- To explore issues around building trust and identifying barriers and concerns among communities and stakeholders in Chikwawa district and WASH researchers
- To develop ideas around strengthening relations and developing mutual understanding between community members and stakeholders when engaging with research
- To identify and document good practice and recommendations for better collaboration between communities and researchers

With respect to the last objective and following recommendations from those that were in attendance at the workshop, this leaflet has been made as a simple guide to good research practice.



District Executive Group meeting

Before new research projects are done in an area, notify the District Executive Committee (DEC) which has the mandate to approve and oversee decisions on behalf of the district, including issues of health, water, sanitation, community engagement and monitoring.

On water and sanitation issues you should also consult the District Coordinating Team (DCT).

Explain what the research is all about, why it is being conducted, the potential benefits, where it will be conducted, who will be involved, and how long it will take. The DEC members will provide you with valuable feedback, which you should take into consideration.





Area Executive and Development Committee meeting

After receiving approval from the DEC, you should proceed to sensitise the Area Executive Committee (technical extension workers) and the Area Development Committee (community representative).

You should provide a clear explanation of what the research is about (as with DEC) and allow time for discussion, questions and feedback. These committees can provide valuable insight to the barriers and challenges you may face.

Ensure you address their concerns and recommendations.

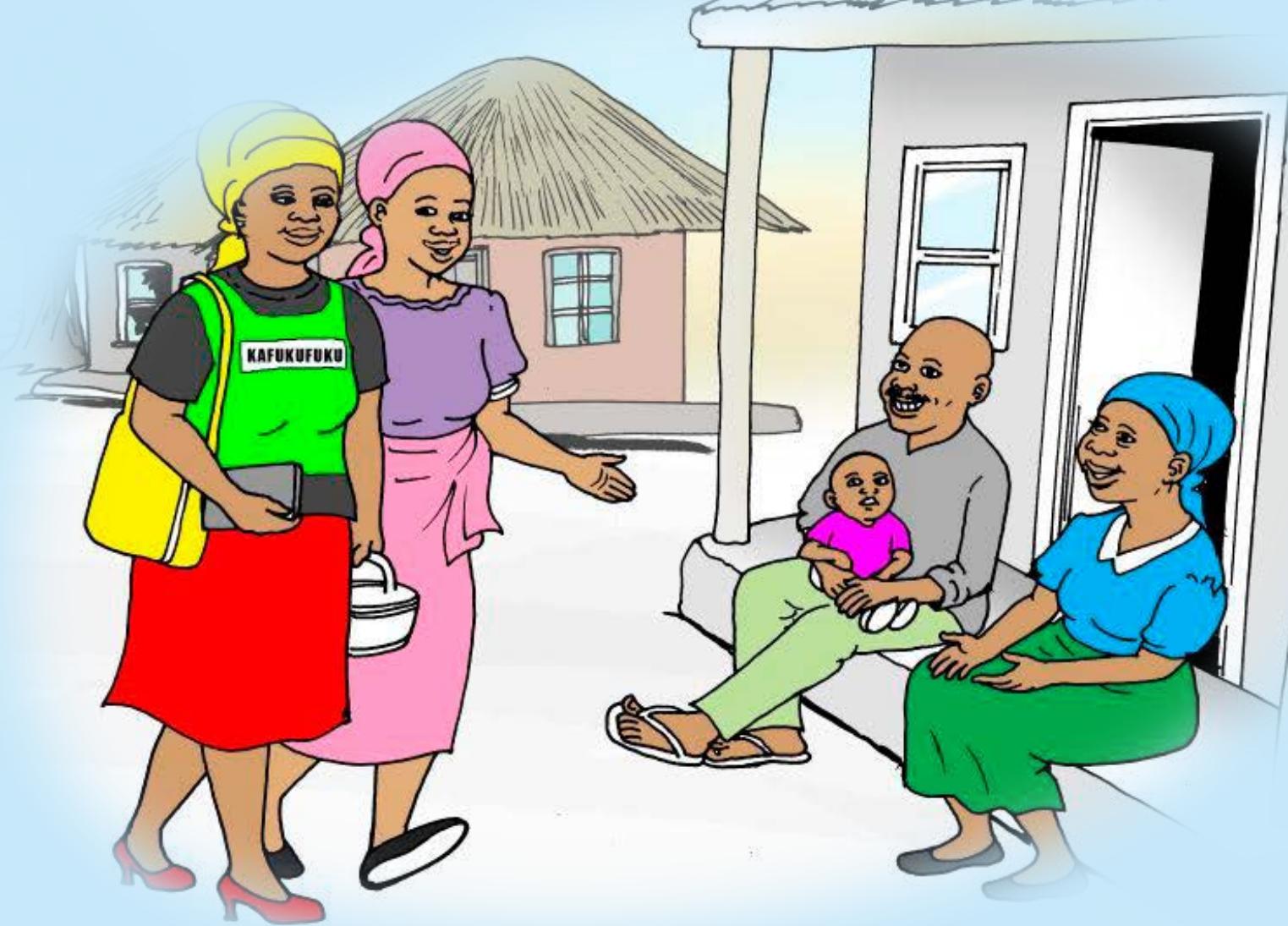


Community leadership

It is of paramount importance to meet the village leadership ideally through the Village Development Committee (this includes the village head, chief councilors/assistants/advisors and concerned committee representatives etc.) before research starts. Wherever possible and appropriate, involve the HSA or other relevant extension worker of the village - they should be in attendance to support your meeting having been sensitized at AEC/ADC level. Explain in simple terms what the research is about, why it is being conducted, the potential benefits, where it will be conducted, who will be involved (inclusion/exclusion criteria) and how long it will take.

Information shared will depend on research methodology, e.g. in single/double blind research.

As previously mentioned, community leadership can offer valuable insights to community acceptance of your research, so ensure you make time to listen and consider their input.



Identifying households

A successful meeting with the community leadership should result in community guides/volunteers being assigned to the enumerators. They will support household identification on the day of research and create community confidence. Ensure that enumerators have some form of identification, and that clothing is appropriate to the Malawian culture e.g. For ladies, clothes that are less revealing; putting on a wrapper (chitenje) and covering the hair presents a good outlook. For men, ensure that the T-shirts do not have strange drawings/images/messages with potential to raise questions or concerns.

Enumerators should be escorted to the household by community guides/volunteers. To ensure that the guides do not influence the sampling method used, enumerators should independently select households and ask the volunteer to guide them to the house and introduce them.



Obtaining household consent

Once at the household, the researcher has to introduce themselves, say what the study is about, how long it will take, and request consent from the household members. Allow the respondent to ask questions and make comments regarding the research.

The community guide/volunteer (if present) ought to leave and wait at a distance to ensure the participant(s) respond(s) freely.



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Conducting household interview

Once consent has been obtained, the interview may begin. Do not continue with the interview if consent is not given. If a phone or tablet is used to collect data make it clear to the respondents how this works: some may interpret looking at the tablet or phone while talking to them as a sign of disrespect.

Be friendly and listen attentively.



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Observation

During observations, household activities should be allowed to proceed normally without interference from the observer; observe the privacy of the household i.e. do not talk about what has been seen in one household in another.

Try to blend in as much as possible so as to avoid being a burden to the household.



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Taking samples

There are many different types of sample, e.g. faeces, blood, water, swabs, etc. Explain why the sample is being taken, how much will be taken and what will be done with the sample to avoid misconceptions.



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Intervention

In some research, you may put an intervention in place with groups or individuals. Always remember to listen as well as explain to ensure you address any questions or concerns.

Leaving the household

After the interview/observation/sampling/teaching, thank the participants for their time and leave the household. Make sure to communicate when the respondents can expect you next, if a return trip to the household will be made in the future, or when they should expect feedback.





Feedback to District

Ensure that feedback is given to the DEC, AEC, ADC and any other relevant groups or committees at District level. Feedback should be given several times over a project period (progress reports) or at the end (results of the study) depending on length of the research or project.





Feedback to communities

It is very important to give feedback (study results) to the community as a whole. This helps community members appreciate what was done and see the benefit of the research in general.

Make sure that the results of the study are presented in the simple terms to accommodate all literacy levels. Give time for questions and comments during the presentation of the results.

Feedback at household level

In some cases for example, if results of a study are confidential, feedback should be given to individual households. Give time for questions and comments during or after the presentation of the study results. Present the results as simply as possible.



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