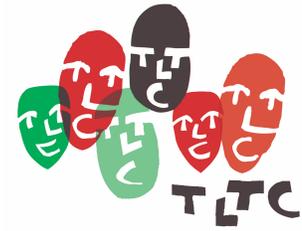


DOCUMENTATION GUIDE #2: RECRUITING AND TRAINING INTERVIEWERS



Recruiting Interviewers

As part of staffing for the Tsogolo la Thanzi research project, interviewer advertisements were printed and put in strategic areas around Balaka Boma; areas most people visited frequently: the District commissioner's office, the Balaka district hospital and the police office. Interviews were conducted with more than 100 applicants; initial written interviews were followed by oral interviews with shortlisted candidates. In the end, a group of 26 interviewers were selected. Although our priority was to recruit mostly from within Balaka, we ended up with a mixture of Balaka residents and a few interviewers from other districts surrounding Balaka. The primary reason we hoped to hire many interviewers from Balaka was that our project was to be based in Balaka for a couple of years and we wanted to build local capacity. Another reason was that the project would involve the communities around the Boma, and interviewers from Balaka could help us navigate the terrain socially and geographically.

HIV Testing and Counselling (HTC) Training for the Pioneer Interviewers

Soon after recruitment we decided to start HIV Testing and Counseling training for our interviewers. Apart from the survey, another major component for Tsogolo la Thanzi was HIV testing; it could have been easier and cheaper to recruit people already with HTC knowledge but it would also have gone against our policy of investing in local talent. We also felt the skills needed to be a great interviewer were harder to find and that our 26 interviewers could become good HTC counselors more easily than vice versa. We worked with the Malawi Ministry of Health to hire a group of Certified HTC Trainers from within Balaka District (i.e., nurses, clinical officers, laboratory technicians) to train our 26 interviewers in accordance with the national HTC protocols. After completing the standard 21 days of training and passing written and practical exams, our 26 interviewers qualified as Malawi Ministry of Health certified HTC counselors. This meant they could not only test and counsel our clients, but if they stopped working with us or at the end of our project they could get HTC counseling jobs with other organizations.

Survey Questionnaire Training

After HTC training, interviewers began training for the other component of our project—the survey questionnaire. We had put together an elaborate quantitative questionnaire comprised of many different sections relating to health, religion, education, fertility, and sexual behavior, as well as expectations for the future. For some interviewers, this kind of questionnaire was not new to them since they already had some experience from previous surveys (e.g., MDICP, DHS, Census), but for others it was completely new. Two weeks were set aside for proper training of

the interviewers in our survey instruments. Training was conducted in both English and Chichewa. Careful thought was put into how to both teach those without much research experience to collect quality data and also help those with considerable experience in research unlearn bad habits in data collection (i.e., asking leading questions and falsifying data, among others) in case they were exposed to such practices during previous research experiences.

After mapping the training strategy, supervisors and PIs assigned the interviewers to 5 groups, making sure that in each group there was a combination of experienced and inexperienced interviewers. Each section of the questionnaire was given 4-hours of training. The training for each section involved a supervisor introducing the section and explaining the purpose of the section. Then interviewers were given a chance to discuss the specific questions in the section in their group and then each group was asked to explain what they thought each question was targeting and how they would go about asking respondents such questions. After group presentations, the supervisor would randomly select from any group 2 interviewers for a mock interview—one to be an interviewer the other a respondent. The rest of the team was asked to take notes on the interview. After the mock interview, the rest of the group was asked to evaluate their teammates, highlighting where the interview was good and where it didn't go well. The observing interviewers took into consideration the presentation, the way the questions were asked, the responses of the respondent and the design of the questions themselves. The interviewers would also be encouraged to raise any concerns to the supervisor. Among some of the concerns would be interpretation of the question. For example, if the translation to the local language changed the meaning of what the question was asking for in English or could be misinterpreted by the respondent, the interviewers and supervisors would discuss this at length, repeatedly referring to the initial intent of the question in English. After such deliberations, the supervisor would take notes and present them to the project PIs, who would make adjustments to accommodate the concerns raised. An edited section would be presented to the team the next day and scrutinized again. Only when no more concerns were raised, was a section was considered to be "locked" and training complete.

Training on Data Quality

We found it essential to put much emphasis on data quality in the early stages of training—even before the interviewers had the chance to administer the questionnaire. Inculcating a culture of valuing quality data in our interviewers was our top-most priority. As such, soon after the questionnaire training, the Data Manager conducted training sessions with the team on the importance of quality data. Strong emphasis would be put on originality; what comes from the respondent's mouth should not be disputed or distorted to fit the ideas of the interviewer. The interviewer was not to show any prejudice over the respondent in regard to financial status, religion or age and no additions or subtraction were to be made to what the respondent says. The interviewer was at liberty to ask for clarification from the respondent but was not at liberty to tell the respondent that what he/she was answering was wrong or right in any way. Apart from any other offenses much emphasis was put on the importance of careful and neat recording of responses (e.g., if the interviewer is not being clear and careful, a 3 could look like an 8 to a data entry clerk). With regard to data faking, interviewers were told that anyone found falsifying data would be immediately dismissed.

After a session on the importance of data quality the interviewers were encouraged to ask questions about everything they had trained on; supervisors addressed each and every query.

After training in the questionnaire, the data manager trained the interviewers on the use of other supporting tools and documents—things like coversheets and biomarker sheets for HIV and pregnancy testing. After all instruments were carefully looked at by the interviewers, field trips were planned for a pilot survey for training purposes.

Pilot Survey

All pilot surveys for TLT were done in Ntcheu Boma, another district 45km from Balaka Boma. The reason was that doing a pilot in Balaka district—even out of the sample radius—would risk interviewing eventual TLT respondents. At this time we had not yet drawn our sample or recruited our respondents. Piloting for the baseline survey took about 10 days. This timeframe changed with subsequent section pilots that were done later on in the study. Section pilots took between 3 and 4 days. During every day of the pilot (both for baseline and section) the interviewer team and field supervisor would meet after coming from the field and share feedback about the instrument. For example: which questions were confusing to respondents, which needed further clarification when asking, questions which were not translated well or not worded well or questions which produced unexpected reactions and needed to be handled carefully and with proficiency. After each feedback, PIs would be briefed and necessary amendments either to the strategy of the pilot, the questionnaire itself, or interviewer training would be made. The interviewer, field supervisor, and PI communication triangle continued until we were satisfied that the instruments were impeccable.

Recruiting Additional/Replacing Interviewers

As the study progressed, some interviewers were dismissed due to breach of contract and others moved on to better job opportunities. With a declining staff and rising numbers in the male sample through the continual enrollment of partners, there was need to fill the human resource gaps. As tradition, interviewer advertisements were placed in strategic areas around the Boma. After oral interviews, which would take a day or two depending on number of interviewers needed, training would commence. The HTC certificate was a requirement for interviewers hired after the beginning of TLT.

Questionnaire Training for the Additional/Replacing Interviewers

With the study already in 2nd 4th or 5th wave of data collection, it was difficult for a first-time interviewer to ably administer a questionnaire for the particular wave he/she was employed in without appreciating the preceding waves' instruments. This resulted in a training protocol that emphasized in training of the questionnaires used in earlier waves *before* training them on the instruments being fielded at the particular wave the interviewer was offered employment. For instance, if Mary was employed in wave 2, she would be trained in the baseline survey first and then the wave 2 questionnaire and all other instruments; the same for Jack, who was employed in wave 5. Jack would start training in the baseline instruments followed by wave 2, wave 3, wave 4, and only then the wave 5 instruments. All interviewers recruited after the baseline survey went through this process and some were not given a contract and turned back home if they showed that they were incapable of mastering all the questionnaires. The period for training new interviewers was 10 days for all waves after wave 2. Contracts were only given to those who did well in mock interviews that were set at the end of the training period and supervised by a supervisor.

Mock Interviews After Questionnaire Training for the New Interviewers

Mock interviews were staged to train the new interviewers before the start of a new wave and their responsibilities for real TLT respondents. Usually, the recruitment of new interviewers happened in between waves; one month of no data collection separated every 3-month wave of intensified data collection from the next. In order for a new interviewer to easily adapt to the busy days of TLT once a wave started, it was important for him/her to be comfortable with the instruments in a way that the supervisor would be confident to leave him/her alone with the respondent without worry of confusing the respondent. It was a MUST for the supervisor to train an interviewer well so that respondents could not tell an interviewer was NEW. At all costs, we tried to avoid a scenario where the respondent (who, by then, knew the study well after coming to answer questions for a couple of waves) would notice that the one asking him/her questions was new and demand a familiar (i.e., more experienced) interviewer if the new one seemed incompetent. As such, the 10-days training was individually-tailored to the interviewer, rigorous, and designed as a detailed synopsis of TLT's survey protocols. The eleventh day was for mock interviews. Nonetheless, the interview was staged to reflect the reality of an ordinary day for a TLT interviewer collecting data. The only thing that differentiated the mock interviews from the real ones was a) the supervisor's presence during the interview and b) the respondent was NOT a TLT respondent. However, the interview was surely real to the new interviewer whose contract depended on his/her performance in such interviews. The instruments used in these mock interviews were those to be used in the wave the interviewer was recruited in.

Training for Additional Questions/Sections in the Questionnaire

When there were additional questions or modules to be incorporated in the questionnaire, supervisors would discuss the draft instrument (sent by PIs) as a group and make comments. After deliberations between supervisors and PIs, preliminary translations were completed by an experienced TLT staff member. Interviewers would then be engaged to discuss the instruments with supervisors and provide feedback. Feedback from interviewers would be sent to PIs, and further discussion between supervisors and PIs would result from the same. After incorporating the 3 groups' concerns, PIs would revise the questions where necessary and send them to supervisors who would amend problematic translations and present a penultimate draft to the interviewers for training. All instruments were back-translated by an outside party before being finalized and approved by the US and Malawi IRBs. A final day-long training, including a discussion on how the questions should be administered, was done for every added module. These sections were also piloted in Ntcheu Boma, as described earlier in this document. Importantly, the addition of new section(s) to the main questionnaire was not always straightforward. Usually the author of the section was present in the field at the time of training, translation, and piloting. Section authors were highly involved in decisions about piloting and training the interviewers and adjusting the instruments.

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