

Doing Development/Global South Dissertations: A Guide for Undergraduates

by

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Introduction

There is no shortage of excellent books on social science research strategies and methodological techniques suitable for geographers doing research on ‘development’ and/or on the global South. Recently there has been a surge of good quality publications which add to these themes with discussions of ethical considerations and practical issues. Why, then, should we add to this list? We felt that few of them were specifically concerned with the particular needs and constraints of *undergraduate* students who are thinking of doing some form of study in the global South.¹ Most of them seem to be directed at postgraduate researchers or academics. While all researchers must address the issues that these guides raise and discuss – research design, ethics, language differences, logistical problems and so on - many of the challenges are particularly acute for undergraduates. For all but a lucky few, money is a serious constraint, but pretty well everyone has a severe shortage of time. The summer vacation, when most people think about doing their primary research isn’t that long, and there are often other obligations to be met – seeing family and friends, working to raise money, and so on. Undergraduate student researchers are under a lot more pressure to get it right the first time – few can afford the time or money to go back to the field site, or radically overhaul and re-start the research again (graduate researchers and full time academics do have this luxury, and sometimes have to use it!). Finally, for those who want to go abroad to do their research this is very often their first visit to that country or place. Indeed, for some, that is the primary attraction, mixing travel somewhere new with the demands of an undergraduate degree. But this too means that there are particular difficulties for undergraduates.

All researchers face constraints of time, money and various degrees of (un)familiarity with their research subjects and areas – but all of these problems are magnified for undergraduate students. This booklet is specifically designed with these issues in mind, with the aim of encouraging students to do a dissertation in/on the global South in the first place, and then to do it well – rigorously, ethically, enjoyably and productively.

Before continuing, we need to make a distinction between doing a ‘development’ oriented dissertation, and doing a dissertation in or on the global South. As those of you who have done some form of critical development geography will be aware, the ‘development’ label is a deeply contested and problematic rendering of the majority of the world’s places and populations. To this day, and despite all of the critical contributions of feminist and postcolonial scholars and activists, there is a bias within Geography (as a discipline, in teaching, research and publishing) towards thinking in terms of ‘theoretical’ sub-disciplines when looking at Europe and North America (economic geography, urban geography, political geography and so on), but lumping all of those sub-disciplines into one unsatisfactory category of ‘development geography’ when it comes to the majority world – Asia, Africa, the Pacific, Caribbean and South America. Although there are some signs of welcome and long overdue change, geography as a discipline still reflects tremendous Anglo-American bias. One way of disrupting this is precisely to resist the label ‘development

¹ One excellent exception is Vandana Desai and Rob Potter (2006). This offers a much fuller set of discussions, and we would encourage everyone to read it. This booklet provides a shorter introduction for those in the early stages of thinking about doing an undergraduate dissertation on or in the global South.

geography’ unless one is specifically examining just that – the institutions, structures, discourses and practices of intentional Development (for example, foreign aid, or development NGOs). Otherwise, why should a dissertation looking at gentrification in Brooklyn be urban geography, but the same project in Mumbai be considered development geography? Why should an exploration of consumer behaviours in shopping malls in Newcastle be social geography, but the same project in Lagos be development geography? To turn it around, we might also ask why an analysis of poverty alleviation strategies in rural Wales shouldn’t be considered ‘development geography’, as it most certainly would be if the study was located in Laos.

This critique has important implications for thinking about your dissertation. We hope it will stimulate your imagination to think about a whole different range of research possibilities in the global South. If you are enthused about the idea of going to Ghana, say, there is no need for you to start casting about for ‘development’ ideas to explore. Ideas, theories and issues that have caught your attention from other parts of the curriculum – cultural geography, say, or environmental behaviours – are just as legitimate and relevant within Ghana as in Scotland. To turn this around again, if you are fascinated by, say, transport geographies, you don’t automatically have to consider London – why not research what is happening in Lima? Of course, research on Development – that is the intentional institutions, practices, politics and rhetorics – is still important, relevant and legitimate. But, we suggest, it should be understood as such, and the ‘development’ label not just used as code for research in the non-western world.

The booklet is structured along the following lines.

Part 1 looks at getting started – how to move from a broad interest in a topic towards a research question that is based on the ‘wine glass model’ rather than the ‘amorphous blob model’.

Part 2 considers the practical and logistical issues you will confront – again, especially tailored to the idea that as undergraduates, you are likely to be particularly short of time, money and familiarity with the research site. Within these constraints, this chapter will give you advice on how to get the best out of your research. This chapter includes research preparation (e.g. what to do before you depart, and planning for all eventualities), working in the field, and preparation for leaving the field.

Part 3 discusses important ethical considerations you will need to think about and address in your research. In particular, the need for cultural awareness about the ‘norms’ in a foreign country, as well as the ways in which your positionality and associated power dynamics will affect the research, are considered. In addition, the ethical issues related to collaborating with local academics and NGOs are explored. Finally, the ethical issues you need to consider when conducted research (e.g. informed consent, behaviour, clothing), in particular when working with research assistants and/or translators, are discussed. To highlight the complex nature of research ethics, some contentious situations are provided for you to consider.

Part 4 provides an overview of the key health and safety issues that you need to consider before (and during) embarking on overseas fieldwork.

Part 5 focuses on how to achieve funding for your dissertation fieldwork. This includes very practical advice on how to write a 'winning' application, as well as some ideas on sources of funding.

Part 6 explores the issues related to employing research assistants and translators in the field.

Part 7 introduces and critiques 'rapid appraisal' research methods, and in particular the participatory types of research methods that fall under this category. Participatory and rapid appraisal research methods are very popular strategies for hearing 'the voices of the poor' in a fast and efficient manner, but do come with potential problems and are not suitable for every type of research project.

Part 8 introduces interviews, focus groups and diaries as forms of qualitative research methods that you might choose to employ. This section discusses some of the principal ways of implementing these methods, and offers much practical advice, particularly within the global South context.

Part 9 introduces questionnaires as a quantitative method for data collection that you might choose to employ. The section discusses some of the advantages and disadvantages of this method, particularly in the global South context, and advises students to undertake some pilot questionnaire and data inputting.

The book concludes with an annotated bibliography.

Before continuing, we need to establish clearly that this book provides a set of general guidelines. Each university or college will have different formal requirements, timetables and practices in guiding and assessing dissertations. The advice in this book must be tailored to what your specific institution asks of you.

We hope you'll find this booklet useful, and that you will also consider joining DARG to access further information and assistance.

Emma Mawdsley
Chair, DARG
December 2008

A note on DARG

The Developing Areas Research Group (DARG) is one of 28 research/study groups of the Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers). The DARG membership is largely made up of academics, postgraduates and practitioners interested in 'developing areas'. This term has tended to cover Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, but in recent years has been extended to cover the transitional societies of Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR.

Every year DARG organises events to promote the geographical study of developing areas. In addition to sessions at the Annual RGS-IBG Conference, DARG runs workshops on thematic issues (such as poverty or health and development) or methodological debates in development research (such as ethics). DARG is very keen on supporting undergraduate and postgraduate research and interest in the geography of developing areas. Every year we provide funding for postgraduate fieldwork and award an undergraduate dissertation prize for the best dissertation on a 'development' topic completed in Geography at a UK university. This booklet, and the workshops from which it came, are part of our commitment to supporting students.

You can join DARG as part of full membership of the RGS-IBG, or you can just join DARG, which only costs £2 per year for students. A membership form is attached to the end of this document.

For further information about DARG activities see:

<http://www.gg.rhul.ac.uk/DARG/>

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1: Research design: From a hazy idea to a dissertation plan

How do you start?

A tried and trusted way of thinking through (and writing up) an undergraduate dissertation is the 'wine glass model' (Kennedy 1992). If you imagine a glass in profile it has a broad top, narrows down, and then finishes by widening out again. The wide rim at the top is the broad general area or interest of your topic (services in cities), as you move down the glass the bowl becomes narrower or more specific and you start to focus on the specific sub-discipline (the urban geography of services). When you reach the stem you have reached your own very specific and focussed research project (the effectiveness of urban water supply in Cameroon 1995-2005). At the bottom of the glass is the broad foot – this is where you go back to the general issues that you began with only this time you are armed with the findings from your own study to add to the conversation.

For many of us the difficult part is getting started. A typical sequence for, say, water privatisation in Africa, might look like this:

1. You enjoyed the lecture on urban infrastructure, which covered issues like urban geography, connected to health, liveability and economics (top of the wine glass)
2. You did a tutorial essay on how ideas about urban governance are changing in geography (moving down the glass)
3. The bit that really interested you was debates over the role of the private sector in the operation of urban water supplies (further down the bowl of the glass).
4. You are keen to go overseas for your dissertation, and so you start reading around how is the private sector involved in financing water infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa (towards to the stem of the glass)
5. You come across a useful study of water management in Cameroon (towards to the stem of the glass)
6. You find and analyse more secondary data from Cameroon (in the stem of the glass)
7. You start to develop a claim that new investments in urban water infrastructure have been delayed because the Government in Cameroon is resisting privatisation (in the stem of the glass)
8. So you go to Cameroon and during your study you find that the experiment with private sector participation has failed to generate new capital. Interest is returning to public sector management. The last 15 years have produced a period of stagnation with negative consequences for health and productivity. (getting to the bottom of the stem of the glass)
9. You broaden out your conclusions to reflect on the politics of resistance to externally imposed urban/economic policies and the consequences for theorising urban governance around the world (widening out to the foot of the glass)

There are two advantages of this model:

1. The link to the general interest (at the beginning AND the end) forces the author to explain why their specific case matters to a wider audience.
2. The proportions of the 'wineglass' can be modified in relation to data collection – if you don't get enough data you can always expand the 'bowl' of the glass and reduce the 'stem' without losing the overall structure.

The alternative is the ‘amorphous blob model’! Here you enjoyed the urban governance lecture, and decide to go to Cameroon to see ‘what is happening there’. You’ve always wanted to visit Cameroon, so this seems like a good opportunity to combine your degree work with travel. You turn up in Cameroon without a very clear idea of what you want to do and without having done any reading, but know that water privatisation is a big problem that you would like to solve. You start asking around, but don’t know who the best people are to ask, or what it is you really want to know. You aim therefore to ask as many people as possible everything they know about water privatisation. You come home with a mass of interview notes, a few newspaper articles, and have to try and find a framework for analysing it all

The ‘amorphous blob’ approach to turning a vague research idea into a dissertation plan is bad because:

1. It ends up raising dull questions that tend to produce a narrative account of what the researcher did rather than critical engagement with issues.
2. It invites other geographers to ask ‘so what?’ or ‘who cares?’ because it isn’t linked into broader questions or current academic debates.
3. If you get to Cameroon to carry the study out and can’t get hold of any data because the mayor doesn’t like you and the government officials don’t give you access to any documents then you are in trouble.

Think of coming up with a project in terms of the following stages:

1. Identifying an interest
2. Moving from a general interest to a broad topic
3. From a broad topic to a narrow topic
4. From a narrow topic to a research question
5. From a research question to its significance

An interest	The broad academic area of inquiry that your work sits in
A broad topic	A phrase which names the area of research within the interest
A narrow topic	A name for your topic which introduces the parameters of the study and also implies a claim statement to be tested

1. Identifying an interest

- Find a geographical topic that interests you – interests are big, broad and general.
- If you are having trouble working out what really interests you then draw up a list of the ways in which you can tell if something really interests you (time flies when you are reading about it..., you talk about it with friends outside college...it doesn’t send you to sleep... you find you want to argue about it).

2: Moving from an interest to a broad topic

For example: my interest = ‘Nature, Cities, Politics’

My broad research topics are:

- Urban agriculture
- Botanic gardens
- Associational life in cities
- Water use in cities

- Cyborg urbanization

If you are having trouble homing in on broad topics:

- Think about the claims you have heard in lectures or read in books about the general interest. What don't you understand? What do you disagree with?
- Look at the chapter titles or sub-headings that appear in a textbook on your interest
- Think about the important changes that are taking place in your area of interest.
- Think about the differences that occur across space in your interest
- Think about how your interest is covered by the media
- Think about the last time you had a heated conversation about the interest, but didn't have the facts you needed to support your ideas

3: Moving from a broad topic to a narrow topic

To move from a broad topic to a narrower one you need to do several things:

- Draw spatial and temporal limits around the topic
- Where necessary focus on just one aspect of the broad topic (e.g. the water example below focuses on issues of payment and billing)

Broad Topic	Narrow Topic
Urban agriculture	The expansion of urban agriculture in Cameroon during the structural adjustment period.
Botanic gardens	The conflicts between farmers and botanists in the botanic gardens in Limbe, Cameroon from 1916 to the present day.
Associational life in cities	The contribution of contemporary Nigerian associations in London to politics and development in Nigeria.
Water use in cities	The commodification of urban water supplies in West Africa since 1931.
Cyborg urbanization	The dependence of individuals on extended infrastructure networks in modern cities.

As has been mentioned, formulating a narrow topic is step towards identifying a claim statement that you can then analyse

Narrow Topic...	... suggests a claim that can be tested
The expansion of urban agriculture in Cameroon during the structural adjustment period	Urban agriculture has expanded in Cameroon in the last ten years
The conflicts between farmers and botanists in the botanic gardens in Limbe, Cameroon from 1916 to the present day.	Different users of the botanic gardens in Limbe have come into conflict over its value and function.
The contribution of contemporary Nigerian associations in London to politics and development in Nigeria.	Nigerian ethnic associations in London have contributed in significant ways to Nigerian development
The commodification of urban water supplies in West Africa since 1931.	Water has been commodified in West Africa since 1931
The dependence of individuals on extended infrastructure networks in modern cities	Individuals in modern cities depend on extended infrastructure networks

4. From a narrowed topic to a research question

Choose one narrow topic and bombard it with questions, don't think about the answers – just come up with as many questions as you can.

Who, what, when or *where* questions help locate the data you need to gather. They will help guide you when you come to write questionnaires or interview schedules. A lot of your research programme will be governed by them.

How, why questions produce the more analytical and less narrative sections of your dissertation.

It can be helpful to classify all the different questions that you will need to answer as part of your project.

The different elements of the topic	What are the component parts of the project and what are the relationships between those parts?
The structures in which the topic is embedded	What are the larger systems of which your topic is a smaller part?
The history and geography of the topic	Treat the topic as dynamic. What parts of the topic have changed over time and space? How have ideas about the topic changed?
The context of the topic	In what ways is your topic one episode in a larger history?
The characteristics of the elements	How do the component parts of the project differ from each other? What is a typical example of your topic? What is the range of variation?
Comparisons with similar topics	What other topics are a bit like yours? How does your topic compare with others? In what ways is it different?
The value of the topic	What is the use of your topic? Are different parts of the topic of different use?

Narrow Topic	Research question
The expansion of urban agriculture in Cameroon during the structural adjustment period	Why has urban agriculture expanded in the last ten years?
The conflicts between farmers and botanists in the botanic gardens in Limbe, Cameroon from 1916 to the present day.	How have the conflicts between farmers and botanists been resolved?
The contribution of contemporary Nigerian ethnic associations in London to politics and development in Nigeria.	How have ethnic associations in London contributed to Nigerian development?
The commodification of urban water supplies in West Africa since 1931.	How has water been commodified in West Africa since 1931?
The dependence of individuals on extended infrastructure networks in modern cities	Why have individuals in modern cities become so dependant on infrastructure networks?

5. From a research question to its significance

Its always useful to ask yourself ‘So what?’ Why would any other geographer want to learn the answer to my research question? What contribution does my research make to understanding the general interest I began with? In effect you need to provide the justification for the project.

To do this:

- Name your topic
- Name your question
- Name the rationale by going back to your general interest

The following formula can be used as a crude device for articulating your rationale.

“I am studying..... (insert name of the broad topic into space) because I want to find out how/why(insert research question) in order to understand how/why/what..... (insert the rationale based on the interest).

Remember, my own interest is in nature, cities and politics so....

I am studying **urban agriculture** because I want to find out **why it has expanded in Cameroon in the last ten years** in order to understand how **natural resources become incorporated into politics.**

I am studying **water use in Cameroon** because I want to find out about **how water has been commodified** in order to understand **the political struggles over water supply in cities**

I am studying associational life in cities because I want to find out how **hometown associations in London have contributed to Nigerian development** in order to understand how the diaspora can influence **urban politics** in their country of origin

Finding a research topic is not easy, and can be pretty stressful. These guidelines should help – especially if you follow the opening suggestion: be focussed!

2: Logistics (preparing research, being in the field, and leaving)

Carrying out fieldwork abroad presents a range of obstacles which can be negotiated more easily through thoughtful planning and preparation. While it is impossible to plan for every eventuality, there are a number of things you can do in order to ensure that your research is not hijacked by more mundane concerns or serious problems.

Preparing research

A useful maxim to bear in mind when designing overseas fieldwork is that things *will* go wrong. As such, a key to successful overseas research is to be prepared to *react positively and be flexible* when things do go wrong.

The inevitable uncertainties of overseas research apart, it is worthwhile bearing in mind the following before you leave:

- Ensure that you have a firm understanding of *what* you are going to do. In general, those students going abroad need to be far more disciplined in the development of research ideas than those remaining at home. Be honest with yourself – are your ideas advanced enough to facilitate the collection of worthwhile data?
- Have a back-up plan - both alternative methodologies for achieving the same research goal(s), as well as substantive alternative research questions.
- Remember – in most cases you will not be able to go back to your research site, so make sure you collect sufficient data and investigate your ideas and questions thoroughly whilst overseas.
- Firm up contacts well in advance (ideally several weeks) of leaving for the research site via email/fax/phone. These might include academics, policy-makers, NGO representatives etc. Be sure to carry paper-copies of these contact details in case internet access is limited once you arrive.
- Think laterally about possible useful contacts. Ask your supervisor for her/his ideas.
- Visa requirements. Check these out on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website (www.fco.gov.uk) (or the relevant embassy website). Many require several weeks (for the cheapest option) and may require invitations to be supplied by host institutions/personal friends. Also – check the expiry date of your passport. In some cases, visas will not be issued if your passport has less than 6 months to run. If the FCO website advises against travel to a certain country or area then you must follow this advice in order to comply with insurance and university regulations.
- Inoculations – again the FCO website is useful here. For many inoculations you can make an appointment to see your local nurse at relatively short notice (but not always). However, some medications require a long lead-in time in order to be effective (e.g. malaria). Also, long stays in a country often require additional

medical assurances (e.g. HIV test).

- Clothing – obviously you need to ensure your clothing takes into account the prevailing climate. In addition, think about the nature of your research (interviews with elites, working in remote villages etc). It is important that you feel comfortable and balance this with respecting the social environment in which you will be working. In many countries, people expect you to look smart - they will NOT be impressed if you come to talk to them while wearing shorts and sandals! You should also respect and emulate local dress codes, which may differ for men and women. If bare shoulders/arms/legs are not acceptable, then don't do it.
- First Aid and medical supplies. There are few things worse than feeling ill whilst on fieldwork and often far from assured medical care. Take your daily health seriously. Take sufficient supplies of any prescribed medication (insulin, epipen, painkillers) and it is often useful to obtain an accompanying letter of explanation from your doctor. First Aid packs can be very useful (i.e. antiseptic/light bandage/tape/wipes). You might also consider taking *sealed* First Aid packs with needles. However, you need to be careful here due to security issues whilst in transit. Seek advice from your doctor/relevant embassy. At the least, an accompanying explanatory documentation signed and dated by an appropriate authority is always a good idea.
- Other medicines you might consider (dependent on allergic reactions, intolerances etc.) include: flu capsules (non-soluble), diarrhoea medicines, rehydration powders, aspirin, paracetamol and insect repellent. Make sure you take sufficient supplies of toiletries if they are likely to be difficult to access.
- Equipment – recording equipment and power source. Writing implements/paper! Laptop? Camera? In some cases expensive equipment can more of a hindrance than benefit. Think about where you are going and be honest about your needs in the field. An i-pod may be great, but it will attract attention (possibly from thieves), and also cut you off from all the conversations you could be having!
- Physical address (not PO Box) of where you are staying, embassy, local contacts – take written copies of this with you on the airplane/boat/train as you might need this information in order to pass through border control on arrival. Detailed map of area – google maps provide an excellent resource here. Leave contact addresses and an itinerary if relevant with friends/family/supervisor in the UK
- Copies of all personal documents, which you should aim to keep apart from the originals. A photocopy of your passport and visa can circumvent enormous bureaucratic obstacles if the original is lost/stolen.
- Letters of introduction signed and stamped by your institution stating the purpose of your work.
- Travel insurance. Do not go without this. Ensure you get the best policy for your particular needs – in particular comprehensive health cover, as most countries in the global South do not have a 'free' national health service

- Gifts. Even small gifts can be enjoyed. You shouldn't patronise people, but kids love balloons (easy to carry), while calendars or jars/tins of nice biscuits or sweets can be a pleasant gesture.

Working in the field

- Stay in contact with your supervisor, e.g. via email, during the fieldwork period if at all possible.
- Get to know the area in which you are staying and become comfortable using local public transport.
- Seek local advice wherever possible – for example regarding issues of safety.
- Plan your days. Ensure that you have *specific targets* for each day. For longer periods, ensure that you include some leisure time in your schedule. Plan for disappointment and the need to change your original ideas/methods.
- It is important to cultivate a sense of 'moving forward'/progress in your work so use any 'free time' to jot down your ideas and thoughts – you will be surprised how useful these comments are when you're back home trying to write your dissertation
- Make sure you know the way to buildings where interviews will be held (reconnoitre the day before). Do not presume they will be easy to find. Being late is both frustrating and rude and can result in the loss of important interviews.
- Find places (library, institutions, cafes etc.) where you can work and think about your findings.

Leaving the field

- The way you respond to leaving the field is closely tied in with broader ethical concerns, for example any promises made to participants, as well as your intentions to remain in contact and/or disseminate your findings back to participants.
- Think about *what* you are planning to take home with you – for example research materials as well as gifts. Have you got sufficient room? Is there any restricted material?
- It is often possible to post bulky items back home.
- Thank people for their time.
- If you are not planning to keep up contact, or don't think you will be able to send things back, then don't offer/promise to. Of course, if you can, that is great – but **think** about leaving the field in advance, and decide what is desirable/feasible. It can be a surprisingly stressful time.

3: Ethical Issues in Development Research

Introduction:

This section will consider the role of ethics in development research. But firstly, what is meant by ethics and why is it important to make sure that research plans and practices are “ethical”?

When considering ethics in research, there is a heavy reliance on the idea of “ought” – i.e. that you have a moral obligation to consider ethical concerns in your research. In addition to these reasons of ‘principle’, your university will also have a formal code of practice that you must adhere to in order to acquire research permission. The main ethical issues you are likely to encounter in your research are the ways in which you interact with participants and local ‘experts’ in the field – for example, collaboration with local NGOs and researchers, facilitation of workshops and the participation of local people in your research (e.g. interviewees).

Issues: The specific ethical issues that you will need to consider vary according to the specifics of your project, as well as the empirical context in which you will be working. Indeed, many issues are specific to particular places and circumstances and there is no absolute “right” way of doing things. However, you should be aware of:

- Cultural, economic and political realities (past and present) in the region in which you will be based (gain advice from local researchers and your supervisor).
- Outcome(s) of your research – for example, the possible impact/consequences of your research on local communities/academics (some anticipated and some non-anticipated).

Cultural Understanding:

It is very important that you gain some awareness of the specific culture of the region/country in which you’ll be working before you depart. A good way to do this is by reading extensively about the country and region – not just academic texts, but also novels, biographies, films and music. The things you’re looking out for are the cultural codes/religious norms, local beliefs and practices, as well as everyday behaviours. Some might seem very odd to you (e.g. whether to make eye contact or whether females can wear trousers), but it is vital that you respect them and adopt them.

Researcher’s Positionality:

The second key issue related to research ethics is being aware of your positionality as a researcher. In particular, the economic inequality that exists between you as a student studying in the global North, and those you intend to work alongside in the global South. In addition to economic inequality, there may also be significant power differentials between you as a well-educated representative of a British university, and those you will be working with – particularly if you will be working in a former colonial context. Finally, you will need to consider who benefits primarily from this research - which is probably you, given that you’ll be getting a dissertation out of it, whilst those who help you will remain in the same position as they were prior to your research – and how to fairly represent the aims of your research to potential participants without raising expectations of change.

It is likely that your research will involve collaboration with locals ‘in the field’, most likely academic and/or NGO partners. In fact, we strongly advise to seek out such collaborations in order to ensure that your work is grounded in local issues and learns from local advice. However, be aware that local partners have their own agendas and issues, and their support to you can be costly and time-consuming.

Academic Collaboration:

1. **With Universities.** Linking with local universities can be very useful as they are often able to provide you with access to: research assistance, interpreters, libraries, skills and training. You may be expected to provide financial remuneration for these services.
2. **With Academics.** Linking with local academics can be a very useful way to establish local insights and contacts for your research. However, be aware that their time is precious and you should be sure to send them your dissertation in due course.

NGO Collaboration: Working with or alongside an NGO provides an opportunity to explore development actions ‘at the coal-face’. However, finding an NGO is hard, so you will need to start your search early. Below is some guidance on identifying and contacting suitable NGOs:

1. Find out about NGOs, what they are doing and what are the local issues in the region where you wish to work.
2. Use World Wide Web, lecturers, charities, and directories to identify suitable NGOs
3. Do your homework - search the literature for other studies on NGOs in the same country or sector (e.g. the journals *‘Environment and Urbanization’* and *‘Development in Practice’* often have articles that are written in conjunction with NGOs).
4. Consider whether other NGOs work in the area, and think about the relationships between different NGOs – competitions that might exist within and between them.
5. Consider the non-beneficiaries of project interventions – what do they think?
6. Broaden your sources beyond a specific NGO
7. Provide help to NGOs who have supported your work (write reports)
8. Communities want to see real results/benefits rather than just another report

1. **Advantages of working with a local NGO:**

- NGOs are a good entry point: they have a great deal of local knowledge – contacts, communication networks, background information, language skills.
- Staff may have local insight into your research questions

2. **Problems of working with a local NGO:**

- NGOs are usually very busy
- NGOs want collaboration to reflect well on them, and therefore may steer your research in one particular direction
- NGOs have a very ‘practitioner’ rather than ‘academic’ view.
- Your positionality within a community might be affected by your relationship to an NGO (e.g. you are seen as their representative).
- The nature of a relationship with an NGO as a neutral researcher can be problematic. For example, can you be critical of an NGO’s work whilst maintaining good relations? Recognise the limitations and advantages of

collaborating with an NGO.

3. Advice on working with a local NGO:

- Always try and maintain your own identity as a neutral researcher and impartial observer. Stress that you do not represent the NGO.
- Share your findings at all stages of the research process.

In the Field: Having gained ethics approval before departure, and perhaps developed collaborations with local researchers and NGOs, it is crucial once you're in the field to retain your ethical awareness. Some of the key issues related to this are explored below:

1. **Informed Consent** – it is vital that you secure informed consent from all participants in your research project (not necessarily just the people you interview). Informed consent involved explaining why you are doing this research, and what the intended outcomes are, both for yourself and for them). Depending on the context and your university guidelines, you may need to secure this consent in writing. Some idea of the types of informed consent are:
 - Approval of chiefs and elders in the community before you start research
 - Promises of anonymity to all participants
 - Being aware of the local nuances of power (e.g. short-term research that is unlikely to make a difference)
 - Being aware of local intermediaries and their power to determine your findings and affect levels of 'informed' consent (e.g. as translators and gatekeepers)
 - Being aware of inappropriate research strategies/practices, which may result in the acquisition of biased/wrong information.
2. **Clothes:** Being culturally-aware will ensure that you seek local advice on what to wear and when, and in particular on gender-specific clothing.
3. **Behaviour:** Whilst in the field you should be careful to behave politely and professionally at all times, even if you feel others are not treating you in this way! In particular, be aware of:
 - Positionality – as mentioned earlier
 - Value indigenous knowledge - local people are highly knowledgeable, even if they are illiterate, unschooled etc
 - Openness and honesty in the field and be sure to present your results, even if only very preliminary.
 - Risk to community as a consequence of your presence.
 - Health and emotional well-being: yours and those working with you

Ethical Issues when working with Guides/Translators:

- See Part 6

Showing Gratitude: It is important that you express your thanks to those who have supported and/or participated in your field research without being patronising. Giving gifts to participants is a very obvious indicator of gratitude. However, there are potential problems here with how much and what to give (e.g. cash, essential or luxury food), as well as who to give gifts to and the danger of raising expectations. Some ideas for gifts are:

- Children's materials

- Completing a task identified by the local community
- Holding a party
- Leaving scientific/technical equipment
- Sending copies of publications (journal articles, books) to local academics

After Research/Field Trip: It can be easy to think that your fieldwork is complete once you return to the UK, and it can also be a time of confusion and 'feeling lost' regarding your research. It is therefore really important to do at least the following, as soon as possible after your return:

- Returning translated summaries to participants
- Sending 'plain English' summaries of your research results to local participants and academics/NGOs
- Sending published papers/reports (e.g. your dissertation) to local participants and academics/NGOs
- Thank you letters/emails where appropriate

Ethical Issues: Scenarios

For each of the following scenarios, think about what you would do. There is usually **no one right answer**. The point of the exercise is to get you to think about the ways in which development fieldwork includes many situations where decisions about ethics need to be made.

Situation 1

You are conducting fieldwork in a highland Bolivian village on the impact of microcredit on women's lives. After two weeks in the village you are getting frustrated about the lack of progress. Nobody wants to talk to you. An NGO worker suggests that women would be more willing to participate in the research if they are paid for doing so. What do you do?

Situation 2

You are working on issues of low-income housing provision in Ghana. Some of the government officials you are working with invite you to a party. Everyone gets a bit drunk and people start talking about proposals that are meant to be confidential. This information would be a fantastic addition to your dissertation's argument, but you are aware they are breaking their code of conduct. What do you do?

Situation 3

You are working with an NGO in northern India on a water supply project, examining the degree to which local people are involved in the project. People seem very keen to talk to you and you are getting some great information. However, in one interview it becomes clear that people think you are somebody very important in the NGO who has come to discuss continued funding. If people find out you are a 'lowly student' they may not be so happy to talk. What do you do?

Situation 4

You are working on local environmental issues in *favelas* in Rio. You have successfully worked in two areas and want to work in a third. To gain access to this district you have to go through the local drug baron as he controls the district. Do you agree to use him as the point of entry and use members of his group as translators?

Situation 5

You have applied for a research visa to go to Zimbabwe to work on issues around political violence. The visa application is rejected. Do you still go, but on a tourist visa?

4: Keep safe! Plan in terms of Health and Safety

Hazard and risk are inherent in everything we do, but the degree of hazard and risk is dependent on the activity and environment in which it takes place. In the UK, the degree of risk tends to be less than overseas, particularly in less developed countries where our ability to control the environment and the circumstances we are in, coupled with a lack of knowledge of the environment, is proportionally greater.

All universities now require students (and staff) undertaking fieldwork (in the UK and overseas) to complete some sort of **Risk Assessment** and **Crisis Management Plan**. This is a document in which you identify potential risks and hazards associated with your proposed project. Unfortunately, risk assessments are often considered to be nothing more than a bureaucratic chore. However, a much more useful way to think about them is as a safety management plan – a way to think through the obvious dangers (life-threatening and more routine) that will disrupt your plans; the actions you need to take to reduce or mitigate against the risks; how you will deal with a problem/crisis if it happens (rehearse the ‘what if scenarios’); to make sure you have adequate insurance in place; and to know exactly who and how you can ask for help if you need it.

Although the exact features of the risk assessment forms that you will need to complete for your university and for funding applications differ, there are some key issues (hazards) that should be considered in any risk assessment and safety management plan.

- Those involved (**You/The team**) – in terms of health and fitness (including pre-existing medical conditions); attitude and behaviour, training and experience
- **Environment** - mountain, savannah, tropical forest, urban etc. all present special risks and hazards; need to consider climate and weather conditions, wildlife (including insects), altitude, river crossings, route selection etc.
- **Health** - endemic disease (Dengue, Malaria, HIV/AIDS), polluted water, contaminated food, environmental health (heat/cold related illness)
- **Local population** - political instability or civil unrest, theft, personal attack, attitudes to foreigners, cultural differences.
- **Fieldwork activities and methods** - natural hazards (avalanche, rockfall, deep water), use of specialist equipment (electrical equipment, chemicals, climbing harnesses, ropes, theodolites), questionnaires/interviews on sensitive topics
- **Travel and Accommodation** - transport (public/private), road conditions, other road users, accommodation, fire, electrocution, serious injury, disease, mugging

The risks associated with these range from illness/death, accidents, personal attack, imprisonment etc.

The key five steps in risk assessment are:

1. Identify the hazards and associated risks
2. Identify who is potentially at risk and how
3. Identify the precautions or control measures to minimize the risk, including further action required to reduce these to an acceptable risk
4. Document all of the above (complete a risk assessment form)
5. Review the risk assessment periodically and update it as appropriate

In addition you should complete a **crisis management plan** – this outlines the plans you have in place to deal with an emergency situation, should one occur. What you will do if things go wrong? This should include details on emergency evacuation, insurance, proximity to medical facilities, plans for communicating with the relevant people i.e. local services, your home contact, the British Embassy or High Commission, etc.

There is a wealth of useful links and resources accessible from Geography Outdoors, RGS-IBG on these and other related topics (exemplars of good practice; seminars and training programmes, general advice etc):

<http://www.rgs.org/GO>

5: Getting Funding

Introduction

Lack of funds is one of the key obstacles to undergraduate dissertation research on development issues. Some of the possible solutions are:

- Choose a topic you can research in the UK
- Get further into debt
- Seek other sources of funds

Preparation

Assuming that by reading this document you intend to conduct research in/on the global South, then this section provides practical advice on securing sources of funding for your research (advice on possible funding is detailed at the end of the chapter). Before launching yourself into finding financial support you have to **be prepared**. Make sure that you have worked out:

- Budget
- Timetable
- Project summary

Working out a budget

- For most students, it is transport costs which loom large, but don't forget to budget for **all** possible costs. While this may produce a more daunting figure, it is important that you are realistic from the start and that you are able to present a suitably costed project to any funding agencies.
- Most undergraduate dissertation research will take place in the summer vacation between years 2 and 3. This is usually at peak holiday times, so flight costs go up. Try and be as flexible as you can in terms of departure dates and airports, but remember to keep the needs of the project in mind. It is no good accepting a great flight deal if it means you have to cut two weeks off your proposed trip. Shop around on the internet and campus travel stores.
- Living expenses. If you have never been to your research location then find out as much as you can about costs of living. Again, be sensible about accommodation. When it comes to a choice between safety and cost, safety should always come first.
- Internal travel. The safety factor is again important here. In many parts of the global South there are a range of road transport options. The very cheapest will certainly give you insights into dimensions of local life, but you will also get insights if you travel on slightly more expensive transport which may have a better safety record. Make sure you include cost of travel to the airport in the UK as well.
- Insurance. **DO NOT FORGET THIS.**
- Payment for translators and guides (see later section). You should also budget for gifts if appropriate.
- Equipment. You should not see applying for funding as a chance to get a new

laptop or digital camera, but if there are small pieces of equipment that are vital, then ensure they are included in the budget. Some departments have small items of equipment (e.g. tape recorders, soil kits, tape measures) which can be lent out to students. Check with the appropriate member of staff well in advance. Don't forget the cost of batteries, tapes and film as well.

- Miscellaneous. Could include postage, photocopying, internet access. Think through exactly what you will be doing and what costs may be incurred.
- Vaccinations etc. While some vaccinations are free, you may have to pay for some. In addition, malaria tablets can be expensive depending on the brand. It is perfectly legitimate to include these in your costings.
- Visas. Include costs of visas where appropriate. It is not appropriate to include the cost of a new passport in an application to a funding body.
- Contingencies. It is always useful to have a contingency fund in case of emergencies. This could include things like changes in the exchange rate, or unforeseen expenditure. This is usually costed at 10% of the budget, but as unspecified funds are rarely funded by an external agency, the 'contingency fund' should be listed on your proposal as something that you will provide yourself.
- Including a personal contribution (if you are able) will demonstrate to the funding bodies that you are financially committed to the project. In addition, it reflects the fact that you would have had to spend money if you had stayed in the UK rather than going on fieldwork.
- The budget plan should be laid out neatly so it is easy to read

Example Budget

Gender and Health Project, Oaxaca City, Mexico July-August 2009	
Travel & Subsistence	
Return air fare Heathrow-Mexico City	750.00
Tube: Central London – Heathrow (2 x £4.00)	8.00
Bus: Mexico City-Oaxaca City (2 x £21)	42.00
Subsistence: Mexico City (5 nights x £40)	200.00
Subsistence: Oaxaca City (35 nights x £30)	1050.00
Equipment & Consumables	
Digital recorder	91.00
Batteries	22.00
Photocopying (300 x 2p)	6.00
Gifts for participants	25.00
Insurance	65.00
Contingencies (10 % of budget)	225.00
TOTAL	2484.00
Personal Contribution	350.00
AMOUNT NEEDED	2134.00

Note: Costings are based on exchange rate of £1.00 to 18 Mexican pesos.

Sources of Money

It is impossible to provide a definitive list of funding sources here, but the following provides some suggestions or routes to take:

- *Departmental/university funding.* Some institutions may have funds available. While the sums provided are rarely large, it is still worth applying. It also shows bigger potential grant givers that you have explored lots of avenues, and that you are organised. It also helps reassure them that your project has been approved by your institution.
- *Grant-giving organisations and charitable trusts.* There are many possible sources of funds within this category. To find out which funds are available, use directories such as:
 - Directory of Social Change. This organisation provides support about funding for community and voluntary organisations, but is also able to provide services for individuals. They have a library in London where you can access information about funding bodies. It publishes the *Director of Grant Making Trusts* which should be available in university and public libraries. Their website www.dsc.org.uk has more details.
 - The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers). Provides some support for undergraduate fieldwork. Geography Outdoors may also be able to provide advice about

funding as well as fieldwork planning. www.rgs.org/grants (links to the RGS-IBG funds and other sources too)

- *Charity Choice: The Encyclopedia of Charities on the Internet* www.charitychoice.co.uk. Provides a list of UK charities. Educational charities may provide financial support for students.
 - *International Foundation Directory*. London: Europa Publications. Provides a list of 'foundations, trusts, charitable and grant-making NGOS and similar non-profit institutions'. Again, university libraries should have a copy.
- ***Industry and Commerce*** It may be possible to gain financial support or assistance in kind (e.g. with equipment or flights) by contacting businesses. Remember that large transnational corporations will get many requests for money, so don't get downhearted if your application is rejected. Try and target companies that may have particular link to the work that you are going to do.

Writing a Project Summary & Application Letter

- Do not use the same letter or summary for each application. You need to make sure that your application for funding is appropriate to the destination. While this may take more time, it is more likely to be successful.
- A project summary needs to be understandable for a non-Geography audience. Just rehashing your dissertation abstract is not enough! Try to explain and outline your project as clearly as possible. Use maps if appropriate and make sure you include the budget and timetable. If there are no restrictions on length of application this does not mean you can waffle. Keep it concise.
- Make sure that all your application documents are well presented. If you are not sure about spelling and grammar then make sure you get someone to proof-read it for you. Again, you are trying to present a professional image.
- Include a stamped addressed envelope with any speculative enquiries. You are more likely to get a reply, even if your application is unsuccessful.

Ethics in Funding

In addition to the ethical issues raised in an earlier chapter, there are a number of ethical issues which you should consider when seeking funds.

- Be upfront about what the money is for. Do not try and alter your research proposal to get money and then do a completely different project.
- If you are applying to a private company, make sure that you are happy to receive funding from that company. Consider its record on environmental issues, labour rights etc. if these things are important to you.
- Participants in the research have a right to know where your funding has come from.

Make sure you send a report to any organisation which provides financial or other support, even if this is not a condition of the funding. Usually funders will prefer a one or two page summary report rather than your whole dissertation, but check.

Overview of key funding issues:

The key elements of a good proposal

- 1) Sound and realistic research design
 - An interesting idea
 - Research questions, aims and objectives clearly stated
 - Clear contextual understanding (demonstrating this is an important topic and you know what others have done)
 - Appropriate methodologies
 - Well designed sampling frameworks
 - Sensitivity to host country (e.g. cultural constraints)
 - Clear thoughts on data analysis
 - Defined project outputs
- 2) Logistics - thought through and 'do-able'
 - In field long enough to complete work
 - Time built in for things to go wrong!
 - Complete budget with realistic costs
 - Permissions (if needed) obtained
 - In-country contacts established
- 3) Documented expertise to complete the project safely and responsibly
 - Attention to impacts on people and environment
 - Courses/specialised training (if appropriate)
 - Evidence of discussion with appropriate experts
 - References from advisors with appropriate expertise (approach them early)

Handy Hints

- Identify possible funding sources early – see the DARG handbook and also resources online (www.rgs.org/grants)
- Apply to multiple places
- For each competition, review criteria and FAQ document carefully
- Answer every question
- Follow application layout
- Permissions – request in good time
- Referee Statements – not left to last minute
- Risk Assessment and Crisis Management Plan - needs to be comprehensive

6: Working with research assistants and language issues

Employing a research assistant can be enormously helpful for fieldwork, not only in terms of helping you with data collection and translation, but also with the more intangible aspects of field work such as gaining access to research participants and facilitating your acceptance into the community.

Employing a research assistant means balancing a number of factors:

- **Time:** a research assistant can help you make the most of a relatively short time period in a field setting. This may be particularly helpful in terms of gaining access (physically and socially), in building rapport within the community, and in helping with the nuts and bolts of research. If entry into the community is your primary concern, then a research assistant who is known and trusted by the community will be a valuable asset.
- **Budget:** you will need to consider how much funding you have available to employ a research assistant with the requisite skills.
- **Institutional context:** access to your field site and field community may depend on you working with or through a local NGO. The provision of research assistance may be part of this and you need to bear in mind the implications that this has for the independence of your project and your findings.
- **Research skills:** a research assistant may be an educated outsider who will quickly understand the nature of your research, or a local person with no formal research skills but with good links with the community.
- **Language:** if you do not speak the local language, then a field assistant with fluency in your language and the local language is vital.

Working with an interpreter

Planning for work with an interpreter:

- Budget for and pay a decent wage. In many places, formal translators, or people who speak English and the local language(s) can earn quite a lot. If you want someone good, don't assume that this will be cheap.
- Translating is often difficult, demanding and exhausting. You need to be aware of the pressures on your translator (not just you) when carrying out your research.

Interpreters and you: field work roles:

- When you involve someone else to assist you in communicating with people, it is important to be clear about the capacity in which you wish them to act. They may be a research assistant, an interpreter, or an advocate, and each of these roles brings with it different expectations.

Interpreters and positionality:

- Be aware of your **translator(s) positionality** – their gender, class, background. In many parts of the world, women may feel uncomfortable talking to a male interpreter (e.g. in India, low caste women respondents would find it difficult talking to a high caste man). If your interpreter is from

a particular organisation (an NGO active in the area where you are undertaking research, for example), this may influence the responses you get, either as respondents choose their answers knowing the position of the person asking questions, or as your interpreter poses questions in a particular way. It is not just North/South dynamics that affect fieldwork.

- **Insiders/outsideers.** Choosing an interpreter from the community you are working in may not seem to offer much confidentiality to respondents, particularly in small or closely knit communities. Depending on the subject to be discussed, it may be best to use an interpreter from a little further away if sensitive topics are to be raised.
- Experienced researchers say they would favour an interpreter with **good interpersonal skills** (tact, interest in what people are saying) over someone with better language skills.

Briefing your interpreter:

- Spend **sufficient time** explaining to your translator(s) what it is you are doing and what you want. They will work much better if you have spent a day (or more) talking about the goals, methods and issues of your research subject.
- It is important to encourage the person interpreting for you to let you know how questions will be understood in their language. Often concepts (including common terms like 'household', 'work' or 'child') do not simply translate directly from one language to another. If you do not do this, you may find they alter your questions in any case, to avoid the embarrassment of asking what seem to them to be stupid questions.
- You need to make it clear that you want to **know exactly** what respondents are saying, and you do not want your interpreter to censor, edit or paraphrase what is being said, whatever their own views on it.
- Learning to work with an interpreter is a skill in itself and takes time to perfect: never pretend to have understood when you have not.

At the end of the field work:

- When you leave, write your interpreters a reference and give them several copies to keep. It may help them find future work, including further translating.
- Make sure your interpreter is given due acknowledgement in your dissertation and any reports that you may write from the research.

7: Rapid Appraisal Techniques

Rapid appraisal techniques have long been the stuff of development work, used by development practitioners (NGOs and development agencies) to generate data quickly and cost-effectively on the features of local groups, and community needs and priorities, largely for the purpose of designing development interventions. In recent years, many of these techniques have been used in academic work in developing world settings, and with a number of caveats, rapid appraisal can be a useful 'way in' to a chosen research problem and a means of familiarising the researcher with a particular research setting. Rapid appraisal techniques involve two closely related families of approaches: rapid rural appraisal or RRA (not always rapid, not necessarily rural, not necessarily involving an appraisal) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Both RRA and PRA have been referred to as data economizing or data-optimizing approaches.

Origins:

- Dissatisfaction with the anti-poverty biases of 'rural development tourism' and concerns related to the brief visits of the urban professional (Chambers, 1983), as well as spatial, personal, seasonal and diplomatic biases within research work, led to the development of more 'participatory' approaches that seek to include the 'voices of the poor' themselves.
- In terms of research methods, disillusionment with the normal processes of questionnaires - which are tedious, long-winded, difficult to implement and write up - as well as a recognition that rapid appraisal techniques were less costly and more time-effective than questionnaires and anthropological approaches (i.e. one-two year 'immersion'), led to the use of more participatory appraisal techniques.

A Different Approach to Development Research:

- Researchers facilitate rather than dominate/dictate the research process.
- Methods shift from pre-determined closed research questions, to open lines of investigation; from individual to group; from verbal to visual; and from measuring to comparing.
- Rapid appraisal techniques emphasise partnership and sharing of information, experience, food and training between insiders and outsiders and between organisations.

Common Principles of RRA and PRA

- *A reversal of learning*: to learn from people, directly, on the site and face-to-face, gaining from local physical, technical and social knowledge.
- *Learning rapidly and progressively*: with conscious exploration, flexible use of methods, improvisation and cross-checking, rather than following a 'research blueprint'.
- *Offsetting biases*: by being relaxed and not rushing, listening not lecturing, probing instead of passing onto the next topic, seeking out the poor, women and marginalised, and learning their priorities and concerns.

- *Triangulating*: meaning using a range of methods, types of information and/or disciplines to cross-check.
- *Seeking diversity*: looking for variability rather than averages by deliberately seeking out and investigating contradictions, anomalies and 'differentness'.

Additional Principles Stressed by Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA)

PRA is more of a development approach than a research approach. It is (in theory) about empowering local people to recognise their knowledge and capabilities, and then to facilitate them in making and implementing decisions. As such, it is a very powerful tool, with scope that goes way beyond that of dissertation research and thus must be used with caution.

- *Facilitating*: facilitating investigation, analysis, presentation and learning by people themselves so that they present and own the outcomes, and also learn. This entails an outsider starting a process then sitting back and not intervening.
- *Self-critical awareness and responsibility*: facilitators are continuously examining and reflecting upon their own behaviour and trying to do better, using own best judgement and accepting responsibility rather than relying on a manual or set of rules.
- *Sharing of information*: between people, between researchers and local people, between different researchers in which no one person/group is 'expert'.

Tools and Techniques

Some typical RRA/PRA techniques/approaches:

- *Review of secondary sources*: files, books, maps, aerial photographs etc.
- *Structured observation*: e.g. transect walks. Systematically walking through a local area (sometimes on a line) with (a) knowledgeable local person(s). Asking listening, discussing and learning about vegetation, land use, soil types, burial practices, local problems, livelihood practices and so on. Take several transects at different times to reveal daily livelihood patterns. Results then diagramatised/mapped.
- *Semi-structured interviews*:
 - Key individuals
 - Focus groups, homogeneous or mixed (gender, age, ethnicity etc)
 - Off-setting biases: e.g. talking to those who are normally missed (women, the poor, aged, children, sick) and in places usually overlooked (rural, difficult terrain, mountains) and at times that are often avoided (rainy season, the weekend, evening)
 - *Case studies and stories*

Some typical RRA?PRA approaches:

- 'Handing over the stick' to participants to lead the research process. Basically, PRA is facilitating people to do things themselves. Give them the chalk, pen or stick. Help them become the mappers, observers, analysts and so on.
- Reverse roles of expertise. Insiders and local people as the experts, 'outsiders' as the students.
- Local analysis of secondary material (e.g. aerial photos of soil type, or land tenure maps and records).

PRA techniques:

- *Wealth ranking:* informants rank members of a group/community according to wealth and sort into as many categories as they see fit. Needs to be accompanied by discussion about what makes people wealthy and poor (potentially sensitive).
- *Mapping and modelling:* Ask different people to draw their own maps and models - land tenure, boundaries, resource location, land-mine location, health maps, social data etc (potentially politically sensitive).
- *Resource evaluation:* comparing the value, availability and cost of various resources by ranking them or constructing a matrix to compare particular resources.
- *Time-lines and change analysis:* chronologies of events, listing major local incidences, people's accounts of the past etc. (whether social customs, animal ownership, ecological histories, changes in the cost of living etc.).
- *Seasonal calendars:* by major season or month. Show distribution of rainfall, crop cycles, men and women's labour, diet, illnesses, sources of income, expenditure. Use charts which layer the information down the page rather than long and tedious individual questionnaires.
- *Daily time use analysis:* how do different groups/individuals in the community use different resources/services/activities at different times of the day?
- *Spider and venn diagrams:* of connections and perceptions of connections between issues under investigation. Participants list the variables and elements that are involved in a particular issue and draw lines between them to illustrate how they are connected.
- *Shared presentation of results:* given that you have been equal participants in the research process, there should be an equal presentation of the results e.g. a workshop to which all interested parties are invited. However, how you run this event (e.g.who dominates/interrupts/talks etc.) is crucial.
- *Drama and participatory video-making:* Given low literacy levels in many low-income communities of the global South, PRA techniques favour visual and verbal methods. Encouraging participants to co-ordinate and present a drama or create a video of their ideas provides an exciting and novel way to gain information and present findings.

- *Immediate report-making*: rather than mining data and then going 'home' to write-up your research findings into a neat report, conduct a participatory meeting in which the findings are identified by participants and a mini-report is created (not necessarily written).

Potential Advantages of PRA and RRA:

- Demonstrates to research participants and to others that people have *capabilities*. Helps counter eroded self-confidence (especially among the particularly marginal).
- *Behaviour and rapport*. PRA and RRA techniques are much more relaxed than traditional outsider/insider interaction.
- *Diagramming and visual sharing*. Not only are you employing methods that the illiterate can access (thereby reducing 'power' asymmetries), but above all, the 'result' is shared with all participants (compare the results of a questionnaire) and therefore people are building their own knowledge, not having it extracted from them. PRA and RRA techniques encourage equality between speakers of various languages and between literates and non-literates.
- *Expressing and analysing complexity*. PRA and RRA allow presentation, discussion and analysis of difference and diversity, as opposed to more traditional research methods (e.g. data analysis of questionnaires) which seek to achieve consensus and uniformity.
- *Sequences*. Often the techniques allow and encourage the making of increasingly deep and complex information. E.g. a village map may get increasingly more detailed, or a health survey may prompt new questions etc.
- *Validity*. Chambers (1997) gives many examples where RRA/PRA studies have shown to be as sufficiently accurate and representative (and frequently more so) than previous or follow-up studies on the same issues. Not just that RRA/PRA are faster and more cost-effective, but they generate the same results, often with more insight, complexity and coherence.

Potential problems:

- There are contexts/cases in which RRA/PRA are simply not appropriate: e.g. can RRA/PRA be done in the time available and will it yield data appropriate to the research question? Good information takes time and patience to gather and requires observation, checking, evaluating and cross-checking.
- Emphasis on the public domain in data gathering can result in a particular 'version' of a community's story being presented to outsiders. Certain forms of knowledge may not be revealed in a public setting.
- Emphasis on group data gathering can involve an erroneous conception of 'community' that masks community politics, social divisions and the voices of marginal groups (women, the poor, children, the sick etc).
- Can lead to generalisations and superficiality unless a decent in-depth and multi-

tooled strategy is undertaken.

- Some of the methods used are politically sensitive, for example, maps may be associated with the interests of powerful groups and therefore some groups may be unwilling to 'map' resources, seeing this as a first stage in letting go of local resource control.
- Has become so popular that there has been a considerable demand from NGOs and governments to employ RRA/PRA methods. This has easily led to bad practice – e.g. researchers/practitioners going in too hastily without enough forethought.
- Practitioners have sometimes not managed to or not bothered to try and alter old behaviours of dominating and didactic behaviour (from small to large e.g. demanding a chair, wearing rich clothes, speaking in the derogative etc.).
- Still may not escape imposing 'our' ideas and categories on 'them'.
- **RRA/PRA are not the 'easy options'. Like all good research, they require patience, care and forethought, and get better with experience.**

8: Interviews (including life histories), focus groups and diaries

Interviews

Interviewing is a useful methodology for exploring the reasons behind certain actions, underlying motives, and also for exposing the complexities of lives that are stereotyped and simplified within the general literature. Interviews can take various forms dependent upon the nature of the subject, the status of the respondent and the aims of the research.

The elite/'expert' interview

These interviews tend to be of a formal nature and might involve decision-makers, politicians, business people etc. In general, these people are interviewed for the expert knowledge they possess and this determines the overall structure of the interview process.

- Think carefully about whom you want to interview. Ask yourself whether you can expect to obtain original information. In some instances, expert interviewees will simply regurgitate the 'party line' which is readily available in electronic or paper form. In other words, do not become obsessed with the 'kudos' of the interviewee. Junior staff, for example, often provide far more interesting insight into the workings of an organisation than their more senior colleagues.
- Expert interviews can be daunting and therefore detailed preparation is essential. We are all busy, and busy people can resent (quite reasonably) having their time wasted. It is therefore imperative that you adopt an efficient and professional manner. They won't be charmed by a show of immature ineptness – impress them!
- Once you have decided on your target figure(s), think carefully about *what* you want to ask them. You should be able to provide a concise outline of your intentions in the initial contact email/letter/fax communication. You might follow this up with an interview schedule.
- Be prepared for slow responses and, indeed, no response at all. This demands an imaginative and dynamic approach to the interview process with multiple actors contacted. Do not take a negative response personally. It is likely that the individual you are contacting has many such requests and she/he may be simply too busy to respond. Certainly do not 'hound' the individual concerned. Move on and explore other possibilities.
- In your initial covering letter/email it is worthwhile indicating dates/times which are convenient for you to meet and the likely length of the interview. Be flexible.
- Dress – expert interviews often take place at the person's place of work. You will be nervous and this can be amplified if you do not feel comfortable in the surroundings. Also think about the impression you want to convey to the interviewee.

- You need to establish the terms of reference for the interview. Be aware that a recorded interview will often generate different answers to an unrecorded interview. The interviewee may want to see a transcribed version of the interview before it is used in a dissertation/publication. Such issues should be determined prior to the interview if at all possible.
- The interviewee may want comments to be 'off the record'. 'Off the record' interviews are not a waste of time. While you will not be able to use the material directly in your work you will often acquire a useful insight into the subject area.
- Ultimately, it is very important to respect the wishes of the individual. You should make it clear *what* you are going to do with the interview material and obtain the appropriate permission.
- During the interview adhere to the interview schedule. Make sure you turn the recorder on if one is being used. Be positive – make eye contact. Be concise. Time is of the essence and there is nothing worse than the interviewer rambling on for several minutes as she/he attempts to articulate a question.
- Listen to what is said and react appropriately (i.e. seek clarification – it might not be possible later). Observe body language, style of delivery etc.
- Bring the interview to an end efficiently. Ask whether it would be possible to follow up the interview with an email/phone call if such a necessity arises.

Informal interview

In contrast to the expert interview, informal interviews are often less pressurised for time and provide you with the opportunity to adopt a more conversational approach during the interview. Nevertheless, it is important to maintain the high level of preparedness associated with the expert interview.

You might also consider conducting *serial interviews* i.e. carrying out a series of interviews with the same subject. This approach is only possible with certain respondents but can be useful in gaining the trust of the interviewee in order to facilitate a deep engagement with a particular issue over time.

Oral histories

Oral/life histories are useful in facilitating an in-depth exploration of someone's life where you are interested in discerning underlying intentions, motives etc. associated with a particular issue/theme. In addition, they can facilitate an understanding of the characteristics and internal dynamics of a specific group of people or a particular historical event.

While oral histories require an underlying structure/focus, the emphasis is typically on exploring a particular life or event in concert with the interviewee. It is important to create an environment in which the respondent feels comfortable and able to roam freely across topic areas. Unlike the expert interview where time is of the essence, oral histories should ideally have few time constraints. As a consequence,

digression/detours into related (and not so related areas) is to be encouraged. Indeed, it is often in such instances that real insight into a topic is gained.

- Initial contact – it is important to provide the intended target with a concise outline of your aims/objectives. This encourages the interviewee to think about things in advance of the meeting which can improve the flow of the conversation. In addition, she/he may be able to locate old records and memorabilia prior to the meeting.
- In order to ensure the correct atmosphere think carefully about the time and place of the meeting. Ideally, you should choose a quiet environment where you will be subject to minimal disturbances. The respondent may invite you to her/his home. Such gestures should be treated with utmost respect.
- During the meeting it is important that you encourage the respondent to expand on points. Enunciate questions clearly and concisely. Do not be too hasty to fill silences. Allow the respondent to think and formulate ideas. Allow them to ‘wander’ around topics.
- At the same time, maintain a focus on what you want to get out of the meeting and steer conversation as appropriate.
- Equipment – ‘spider’ microphones are particularly useful (i.e. unobtrusive). Ensure you have spare tapes and/or batteries.
- Oral histories will often cover very personal events or else encourage meaningful reflection. You should therefore treat the recorded conversation with considerable respect. It is good practice to provide a full transcription (can be both time consuming and costly) for the respondent to go through and amend after the meeting has taken place. In addition, they should be given the opportunity to ask for certain parts of the interview to remain ‘off the record’. As such, the process of carrying out oral histories is necessarily lengthy and this should be taken into account when thinking about employing such a methodology.

Focus groups

Focus groups are useful when you want to explore a contentious issue or the dynamics of a certain group/cohort. In addition, this format can also facilitate engagement with minority groups where access to individuals is undermined by the uncertainties (and fears) of the subject group (e.g. migrant workers) or their age (e.g. school children).

Focus groups can take many forms. Ultimately, however, they should provide an environment in which the subjects feel comfortable. This may mean organising such groups to take place in a school or a community centre etc.

Things to consider:

- size of the discussion group (usually between 4 and 8 persons)
- will you lead the discussion or take a less intrusive role?
- with certain groups it is useful to include a stimulus for discussion – object,

- photograph, image, recording etc.
- how will you record the discussion?
- what strategies will you employ to prevent one person dominating proceedings?

Diaries

Asking participants to keep diaries is a useful source of information for a range of reasons. Diaries can be an effective way of understanding how people experience particular events or perform certain practices over time. This longitudinal insight can sometimes be hard to gather from other methods. Diaries can also provide participants with a place to explore their memories, feelings and emotions and thus they can be less of a record and more of a space for reflection. Written diaries are the most common form of diary, but one could also use video, photography, blog-based diaries, audio or picture based diaries.

Advantages of using diaries: Diaries can provide extensive information, which is written in the participants' own words. Providing diaries can be very cheap (just a booklet and pen) and participants often prefer being able to write their diaries in their own time. Some participants may find diary writing empowering – as a way of unloading difficult memories or establishing an insight into routines they hadn't appreciated before (e.g. frequency of visits to the doctor). Diaries can prove very useful when used in conjunction with other methods, such as photography, interviewing and life histories.

Possible problems with using diaries: Diaries can exclude illiterate people, although you can find substitute writers for them if they agree. Diary writing can be time consuming for the writer and suffer from a decline in effort. This is strongly shaped by the participant's daily life and the amount of time they have available. Diaries written in foreign languages require transcription which is expensive and time consuming. Diary content can often not be verifiable and questions that arise from the content can often not be followed up. Entries can be limited with little explanation. Participants may not return their diaries or complete their entries – incentives may be required. Diaries (because they are written over time) require a reasonable period of time to be spent in the field, such as four weeks.

9: Questionnaires and Survey-Based Research

Why use a questionnaire?

Any standard methods textbook or research methods course should give you a general overview of the advantages and disadvantages of questionnaire-based research. Questionnaires lend themselves well to situations where you want to gain a statistical overview of data that are relatively easy to quantify; they can be useful as a relatively rapid technique (compared to more in-depth interviewing); and once designed (a complex process!), they can be relatively straightforward to actually administer. The disadvantages of questionnaire surveys are that they enforce the researcher's categories and concepts on those being researched, it can be difficult to generate the depth of insight provided by qualitative work (the down-side of covering a breadth of respondents), and if badly conducted, questionnaires can generate superficial data of dubious quality.

All of these generic qualities of questionnaires also hold true for field-based research in the global South. In addition, when working in the global South (especially if this means doing research outside of your own cultural context), there are some additional issues to think about:

How are questionnaires likely to be viewed by your research respondents? If you can, try to find this out before embarking on questionnaire design. In rural India, households are periodically subject to questionnaire surveys by the government and other agencies for various purposes. This has advantages (surveys are fairly widely understood as a 'normal' method of finding things out) and disadvantages (surveys are often used as a basis on which to decide how government or other assistance should be distributed – there may be an expectation that providing the 'right' answers will lead to concrete benefits). In other contexts, a questionnaire may seem like an alien or abrupt form of social interaction – and where they have been used by government or other agencies to gather data for repressive ends, it may be better to think about other methods altogether.

How will questionnaires work with any field assistants you may be using? Again, cultural contexts will differ greatly, but questionnaires can offer a relatively 'safe' and stable method that can give both you and a field assistant/translator a clear set of aims and objectives for fieldwork. Because of this, questionnaires are often used in 'remote' fieldwork – a researcher trains the field assistants, who then conduct questionnaires in her/his absence – but within the context of an undergraduate dissertation this is likely to be a high risk strategy (time to recruit and train field assistants to work independently will be limited), and you might also miss out on valuable field experience from conducting the questionnaire directly yourself (see below).

Questionnaire Design

Importantly, the design stage of your questionnaire should involve you thinking through *all* aspects of the research process below – and not just the research questions themselves. The more you can think about questions of sampling (who do you want to gather data from and why?), conduct (how will you administer the questionnaire in the field?) and analysis (what will your data actually be able to tell you – will it answer your research questions?), the more likely you are to design a questionnaire with appropriate levels of detail and fewer extraneous questions. Again, much of the advice in generic textbooks on questionnaire design will hold for

research in the global South, with some additional qualifications:

Question types: Questionnaires can contain a range of question types, from ‘closed’, tick-box response to ‘open’ questions designed to record answers in a respondent’s own words. Opinion scales and attitudinal questions are widely used in academic and market research in the UK, but may not translate well to other contexts – if in doubt, keep the content and form of questions as simple as possible, as this will hopefully reduce the chances of mistranslation.

Appropriate levels of detail/depth: Remember that there are always limits on respondent’s time, and you shouldn’t design a questionnaire that will take more than half an hour for a respondent to answer. Especially where a research area is new and unfamiliar, there is always a temptation to ask a range of questions that *might* be useful – focus on your overall research questions to avoid a ‘scattergun’ approach.

Cultural translation and data sensitivity: For simple, factual questions, be aware of local units of measure and other definitions, and try to use these wherever possible (e.g. how is land measured, or different systems of ‘months’). Where you are dealing with more complex ideas, ensure first of all that you are avoiding technical jargon or academic language, but also ensure that you have a full understanding of the connotations of local terms you are using (e.g. a field assistant may give you a rough translation of terms such ‘environment’, ‘democracy’ or ‘corruption’ – but these might have different associations and emphases than their English equivalents). Wherever possible, research these more complex ideas using simple, unambiguous language and practical illustrations.

Importantly, take local advice on where your questionnaire deals with sensitive issues – seemingly innocuous questions (‘how many cattle do you have?’) can transgress local social rules – if it’s necessary to include this material, leave it towards the end of a questionnaire.

Testing your questionnaire: Any good methods textbook will stress the importance of piloting your questionnaire, but where you are working in a context that is unfamiliar, this is particularly important. Always discuss your questions at length with field assistants, translators or others, and collectively try to imagine the most awkward/complex answers a respondent could generate. Redesign it to cope with these, and then pilot it on some real respondents. Try to code up their actual responses (do they make sense? are you losing any detail or definition in the coding process?), and then refine the questionnaire and coding schedule again.... It’s a slow and sometimes painful process – so allow space for it within your research timetable – but time spent here can save a lot of wasted time later.

Sampling and Sample Sizes

Questionnaires are intended to produce findings from a sample (the people you have *actually* interviewed) that can then be generalised across a population (all the people you *could have* interviewed) – and the rules governing appropriate sampling strategies and sample sizes don’t differ for fieldwork in global South. One of the most frequently asked questions by students before they start fieldwork is ‘how many questionnaires do I need to do?’. Unfortunately, this is a question that is impossible to answer in the abstract: in general, the more ambitious you intend your analysis to be, the more respondents you are going to need. For example, if you’ve collected data on voting patterns, estimating the total number of voters for party X

across a whole village will require less data than testing whether female-headed households were significantly more likely than male-headed households to vote for that party. Think through the process of what you might actually do with the data in as much detail as possible (see below), and if you are likely to want to work with particular subgroups of your population, make sure you've sampled them appropriately.

One important place where fieldwork in the global South may differ is that background data about your population (how many voters live in area X, what proportion of the population have completed secondary school, etc.) can be much harder to come by – and this can make identifying an appropriate sample more difficult. Conducting a few unstructured interviews with key 'gatekeepers' about your research topic can therefore be very important in substituting for this background data and giving you an overall impression of the likely characteristics of your population.

In the field: Questionnaire Conduct

Although questionnaires may seem like a fairly 'neutral' and impersonal research device relative to in-depth interviewing, it is very important that all of the advice given elsewhere about ethical practice in the field is followed very closely. Some data you are collecting may be sensitive and/or potentially damaging to your respondents, so it is essential that you not only ensure promises of anonymity and confidentiality at an individual level where necessary, but also consider any possible harm that might come from releasing data displayed at an aggregate level.

On a more positive note, directly conducting the questionnaire yourself can be a rich and illuminating experience. If your respondents (and any research assistants) are broadly comfortable with your research aims and methods, actually doing the questionnaire interviews can give you 'valid' purpose for being in a community. As such, it may give you access into public and/or private spaces (such as household compounds) that in turn provide a chance for observation, conversation, and other social interaction. This can be a real opportunity to develop your research topic: in part, by gaining more ethnographic insights beyond the information recorded in the questionnaire itself – but also by *being questioned yourself* about your research and background. This can help to make the experience of doing a survey more of an equal social exchange and less of a process of 'data extraction.'

Data Analysis

As with sampling and sample sizes, once you have your data coded and entered into an appropriate format (such as Excel and SPSS), all of the 'normal' procedures and practices of quantitative analysis apply to your work – in this sense, quantitative analysis is not context-specific. For all quantitative work, you should try to think through in detail from the outset what you will actually do with your data: the statistical tests might you be applying, how might you want to display your data, or produce estimates for complex variables (such as 'household income'). The more precise you can be here *before* you start your fieldwork the better: it will help you fine-tune your questions and coding schedule (to ensure that they will produce data of an appropriate form), and ensure that you are using an appropriately sized and structured sample.

Perhaps one area for special consideration when doing research outside your own cultural context is that of data coding. A well-designed questionnaire should have a

clear coding schedule – one that unambiguously assigns values or to responses, or places them in different categories according to a fixed set of rules. In practice, however, there are always ‘grey areas’ here (e.g. is person X a skilled or unskilled labourer? Which of their many roles counts as their ‘main occupation?’), and this is an area where cultural mistranslation can occur. Good question design can reduce the areas of ambiguity, but where you do end up having to make value judgements at the stage of coding, talk these through with field assistants or others if at all possible.

10: References

There is an ever-expanding literature on research methodologies and research methods in Geography and associated disciplines. The following list aims to give you some idea about what is available. Not all of the references deal directly with 'developing areas', but they will provide some excellent guidance in framing your research project.

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<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Sections/textan.html>

Useful Websites

<http://home.developmentgateway.org/> Development Gateway. Good starting point for information about current development issues, volunteering opportunities etc.

www.fco.gov.uk Foreign and Commonwealth Office

www.latinamericabureau.org/ Latin American Bureau. British-based organisation which seeks to promote understanding and interest in Latin America. Includes information about volunteering in Latin America.

www.oecd.org Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Useful for secondary economic data.

www.iied.org/sarl/pla_notes/ Participatory Learning and Action. Information about PRA and other participatory methods.

www.ibt.org.uk/3WE/ 3WE Organisation. Campaigns for better reporting on international issues by the British media.

<http://www.oneworld.net> One World site. Umbrella site for development organisations and NGOs/ community organisations in the Global South.

www.roughguide-betterworld.com/ Rough Guide to a Better World.

www.undp.org United Nations Development Programme. Useful for secondary data on development indicators.

www.worldbank.org World Bank. Useful for secondary economic data.

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