

Some Basic Tools In Social Science Research : Field Work

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INTRODUCTION

Field work is an important component of research in all disciplines. It has gained growing importance in the social sciences with the stress emphasis on empirical research. In the applied sciences, field work has prime importance. Field work is an integral part of project implementation, and thus important to development programmes and development administration. In the context of research, sound knowledge of field work practices give the researchers the opportunity to practice what they have learnt.

The objectives of this section are as follows:

- *To develop capacity for observation and analyzing social realities.
- *To develop understanding of the needs, problems and programmes for different target groups
- *To develop process-oriented skills in working with individual, families and groups with special references to social support system
- *To develop skills in observation, interviewing, recording, group discussions and leadership
- *To develop skills in holding interviews and using supervisory skills

Preparatory Phase of Field Work:

The selection of the survey sample population or of the target group for field work is the first and most vital step. In the case of social science or management research when you choose your respondents/ study group/clients, you must select only those who will be with you for a period of time so that you are able to complete the field work. You must set limited objectives in such field work.

2. FIELD WORK COMPONENTS:

Field work has several important components which must all be integrated in the field work process if the objectives of the project are to be achieved. The following main components can be discerned that indicate the main processes involved in field work and also the main criteria to be followed by researchers and project implementers.

2.1 Component One : Orientation Visits and Collection of Basic Information:

As a visitor to the research area or project site you must assess the following in the area: the socio-economic ground realities, the cultural backdrop, the political backdrop, and the other details of past research and development work in the area. The following are the main types of information which you may collect in this preliminary phase. .

Basic Information:

A proforma for collecting basic information about an institution/organisation should be created. This information should include:

- Organisational Structure
- History of the Organisation
- Source of Funding : Foreign sources & Indigenous sources
- Buildings
- Transport
- Community aids
- Relationship with other welfare agencies
- Relationship with government departments
- Relationship with Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)
- Relationship with community based organizations (CBOs)
- Relationship with other organizations
- Feedback about Efficiency of the Organization/Agency/Target Group
- Internal problems, External Problems
- Future Plans
- Recognition and Awards
- Affiliations
- Any other Information

2.2 Component Two : Relationship with Project Beneficiaries:

The relationship the researcher establishes with his subject group or the agency-client relationship in project implementation is an important factor in the practice of the field work. To begin with the researcher must explore basic questions, (which ever applicable) such as:

- What are the main objectives of the project?
- What are its targets?
- Has the agency conducted any need-based study to arrive at these targets?
- Have the targets been revised during the year?
- What is the rationale for implementing the project?
- Who are the intended beneficiaries? Children, women, poor, backward castes or anybody else?
- What is their share in the project?
- What is their opinion on the project?
- How far is the concept of 'cost benefit analysis' applied in the project?, etc.

2.3 Component Three: Assignment of Tasks:

You must see at the end of each day's field-work-day whether you have been moving towards your objectives by doing the needful tasks or by preparing the groundwork for these tasks. It is equally important to record the same in your report with your comments/observations. Failures and successes can be reported truthfully since only then the exercise will become meaningful. You will have to prepare for the field work report writing or the report presentation by jotting down the points for discussion.

2.4 Component Four: Nature of Field Work Process:

Survey work, case work and group work, (along with community organization) are the core methods of field work: The methods used in all of these are very similar and can be used virtually in all settings and in all situations. When the field worker is using social work methods, like community organization or social work research, he/she can use the skills and knowledge applied in case work and group work to achieve effective results. Theoretical knowledge alone cannot suffice if you are planning to practice social case work in the field.

Case work has five steps namely: Study, Assessment, Intervention, Termination, and Evaluation. In reality case work practice may not adhere to these steps strictly. In most cases there will be overlapping of the various stages. For example, even after the caseworker has formulated an intervention plan and is implementing it, he/she may obtain information, which necessitates a revision in his/her assessment of the client's problem and subsequently in the intervention model. This being the frequent occurrence in cases the caseworker will be able to constantly modify his/her plan of action and be ready to implement it.

Group work is more difficult to practice than casework as you need a group to begin with and sustain the motivation of the members to attend the group sessions. Group work is easier in schools, orphanages, old age and other institutional set up where people live in groups. In other areas like community set up you will be dealing with groups but you may not be able to conduct group work sessions in a systematic manner. But here too you will be using some techniques of group work. For example, in community setting you will be most likely dealing with a group, which will represent the community. It is unlikely that you will be frequently addressing large crowds while doing community organization. So the experience gained will be useful when you do your community organization method.

Some of the kinds of groups that are studied are:

- Social action groups
- Learning groups
- Skills development groups
- Problem groups
- Induction groups
- Health related groups
- Self help groups(SHGs)

Survey Research does not belong to anyone area and it can be employed by almost any discipline. Today the word "survey" is used more often to describe a method of gathering information from a sample of individuals. This "sample" is usually just a fraction of the population being studied. Surveys represent one of the most common types of quantitative, social science research. Using surveys, it is possible to collect data from large or small populations from the universe of study.

Different types of surveys are actually composed of several research techniques, developed by a variety of disciplines. Two of the most frequently used tools of survey research are the questionnaire and the interview schedule.

Both the questionnaire and the schedule are much used, and frequently abused

tools in gathering a variety of data. They have been used for the collection of personal preferences, social attitudes, beliefs, opinions, behaviour patterns, group practices and habits, and much other data. The increasing use of schedules and questionnaires is probably due to increased emphasis by social scientists on quantitative measurement of uniformly accumulated data.

2.5 Component Five: Teamwork:

When undertaking field work either for research purposes or for project implementation you may face varied problems. In many cases there are problems of cooperation and conflict between the various members of a team when they work together. Another significant factor is that the field worker needs other professionals' or experts help to deal with problems, and it is important that you develop contact with these professionals. This will help you to seek information and do referral services.

2.6. Component Six: Administrative Assignments:

You are expected to do the following when you work as part of a project team.

- Learn to maintain sample service statistics of the agency.
- Participate in the planning of basic programmes and find out how the agency relates the programmes to the wider objectives of the agency.
- Plan out your own programme in consultation with the agency staff.
- Assist in tasks like correspondence, report writing, etc.

2.7. Component Seven: Recording:

These consist of mental notes, jotted notes, fuller notes, and the full field notes themselves. Field notes contain detailed description of events, things previously forgotten, analytic ideas and inferences, impressions and personal feelings, things to think about and do, and reflexive thoughts, which take place during the survey period. Field notes must be completed after each observational period. It is necessary to maintain a diary that should be the researcher's constant companion during the research period.

Verbatim recording describes the experiences of the researcher as it happens. Under the more detailed and scientific diary method the following steps are involved:

- Interview and observation
- Respondent's initial reaction
- Respondent's subsequent reaction along with theory used to analyze the case
- Respondent's future plan
- Researcher's Comments

The method envisages four stages of record writing, namely:

- Recall
- Writing
- Reflection
- Writing again

Recording should be made so that increasing information you elicit from the problem and the analysis is made sound. The complexity of the problem should be reflected in the reports.

3. CONCLUSION:

Field work is an integral part of research in varied disciplines and of project implementation by numerous agencies across the world. Field work requires dedicated effort by the lone researcher or by the team involved in the project. It involves not only technical or theoretical knowledge but is also an intricate exercise in public relations and tests the inter-personal skills of the researcher. The researcher has to carry out the field work keeping in mind the socio-cultural sensitivities and political intricacies involved. Cultural translators and socio-economic compulsions play a vital role in determining outcomes of the field work. Knowledge of field work practices must be combined with deep understanding of the field situations and a sensitive approach towards the target groups. Diligent field work paves the way for sound research and effective project implementation.