COMMON PROBLEMS WITH PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION AND POSSIBLE ‘SOLUTIONS’

Common problems:

- Interviewers lack knowledge or skills
- Information is incomplete or inaccurate
- Questionnaires or checklists neglect key issues
- Interviewers and informants are biased
- Interviewers and informants become bored
- Informants experience assessment fatigue

Any of the problems described in this box could result in inaccurate and unreliable information. If this is fed into the analysis system the final conclusions may be misleading and the recommendations inappropriate.

In order to minimize these problems, the following principles should be observed:

- Collect primary information using an approach that is appropriate to the assessment objectives, the context and the skills of the personnel carrying out the fieldwork.
- Undertake thorough secondary data review to ensure that questionnaires and checklists are as relevant as possible, and that they address fully the specific objectives of the IA.
- Train the enumerators and interviewers well. Ensure that they are able to ask questions in a non-leading and sensitive way, to probe during interviews and to triangulate information. Ensure that interviewers have a thorough knowledge of the context and the issues to be discussed, so that they know what to look for and are alert to unusual information.
- Do not try to carry out too many interviews in one day. It is better to undertake a few high-quality interviews than many interviews that produce inaccurate and incomplete data.
- Discuss impressions and conclusions regularly among the assessment team, at least once a day during the fieldwork.
- Use a variety of informants. Ensure that the perspectives of both women and men are included.
- Triangulate the information. If information from diverse sources converges, it is likely to be accurate; if it is inconsistent or diverges, it is likely that at least one of the sources is providing inaccurate information, or that perspectives differ across the sample.

Sources: adapted from http://www.wfp.org/content/emergency-food-security-assessment-handbook