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RiDNet
Practical Fieldwork Notes

Volume 1

Contributions in this volume are based on presentations given on the occasion of the 1st Researchers in Development Network (RiDNet) Conference, which took place on September, 27 2012 at the University of Leeds. The editors of this volume want to thank all the contributors for their support in making this event such a success.

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SECTION I:

WHAT (NOT) TO SAY:
COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND FIELD ACCESS

Name(s): Victoria Brown, Suzanne Croft, April Murray, Annabel Ward

Institution(s): Newcastle University, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape

Title: **Seeing the Language Barrier as an Opportunity**

Practical Issue:

Whilst conducting fieldwork on risks and vulnerabilities in low income communities in Bangkok we encountered the issue of the language barrier. Our research looked into the effects of flooding on residents' homes and the ways they adapted to cope with their situation. Coming from an architectural background we were interested in both the physical and social spaces of the community.

To collect the research data we spent a lot of time in our two case study communities; however, very little or no English was spoken. Therefore, during our fieldwork we were reliant on interpreters.

Through connections established at several universities in Bangkok, we collaborated with academics and students who joined us in conducting research in the field and acted as interpreters. An English speaking resident from one of the communities also acted as an interpreter. We were unable to have the same interpreter for each visit. Therefore, the language barrier, which was initially a cause for concern, actually became an opportunity to test methods for overcoming it.

The problem was the English abilities of the interpreters available to us. We were unable to use the same approach for all interpreters as it would not have been appropriate. For example:

- The lecturers had excellent levels of English and experience interpreting. Each lecturer also had different styles of interpreting.
- The students had relatively lower levels of English, and always worked in small groups.
- The resident had a low level of English and minimal understanding of research issues and practices.

Possible Solution(s):

The language barrier became an opportunity to test methods for overcoming it. The methods we used ranged from verbal to visual depending on the language skills of the interpreter. With fluent interpreters we were able to conduct interviews and focus groups. However, we realised we needed to be more creative with our approach when dealing with interpreters with lower English levels. We achieved this by using visual cues to provide a focal point for discussion and build rapport. We saw this as 'completing the triangle' between researcher, interpreter and resident, allowing an opportunity for us to engage directly with residents.

Methods such as drawing community timelines and socio-spatial maps required some explanation to instigate, we then directed the activity which was predominantly visual and residents drew independently with minimal prompting. We understood much of what was being discussed through residents' body language and the drawings themselves.

Being invited in to residents' homes to conduct interviews made it possible to ask questions by gesturing and using key Thai words.

Relying on an interpreter when carrying out ethnographic research can dilute the level of interaction with participants. Being able to interact directly through visual means allowed us to build stronger relationships, making the experience more personal and leading to a richer research project.

Name(s):	Jami Dixon
Institution(s):	University of Leeds, School of Earth and Environment
Title:	**(Mis)Communication: Lessons from Uganda**
Practical Issue:	Most of my data collection in the field involved talking to farmers, the majority of whom were unable to speak English. For this reason I used Research Assistants to translate the conversations. One of the biggest challenges I faced was trying to ensure that during the interviews the conversations were translated verbatim. I was trying to collect detailed information about past events and experiences, thus I wanted to ensure that all information was translated and captured. At the same time I needed the questions I asked to be translated in the same way to ensure that the answers matched. Before we entered the field I trained my Research Assistants, we did pilot interviews and I stressed the importance of the translation process, but getting the translations 'right' proved to be extremely challenging. For example, there were long conversations in the local language, which were then summarised to me in one or two sentences and in some cases even just a few words. I felt I was missing information which was undermining my confidence in the translation process. Over time I felt that although the translation process improved as both myself and my Research Assistants gained experience, I had to actively try a couple of solutions.
Possible Solution(s):	To address the issues I was having with my Research Assistants and the translation process I kept talking to my Research Assistants about it and reminding them of the importance of accurate translations. I also tried two solutions: 1) I asked my Research Assistants to listen to the interview recordings at a convenient point and make notes of any information that was missed in the translations. In terms of filling the gaps, this worked well, but was extremely time consuming. In the end I was not able to do this for all interviews. 2) During the interviews I encouraged my Research Assistants to use pen and paper to make notes. This ensured that the key points were captured, but it was not the verbatim translation that I initially desired. I found this was an effective compromise between what would have been a perfect situation and what was practical. Knowing that my Research Assistants were making notes helped restore confidence in the accuracy of the translations.

Name(s): M. Shafiq-Ur Rahman

Institution(s): University of Leeds, Institute for Transport Studies (ITS)

Title: **Effective Communication with the Participants while Conducting Fieldwork in South Asia: Lessons from Bangladesh**

Practical Issue:

This fieldwork note focuses on communicating with the participants (interviewees and participants of focus groups) while conducting field work in South Asia. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with rickshaw-pullers, public transport user groups (i.e. male and female groups of both middle-income and low-income), and disabled people, as well as unstructured in-depth interviews with key informants were conducted for the research 'Integrating BRT systems with Rickshaws' in Dhaka City (Bangladesh). From the experience of conducting fieldwork in Dhaka, it was found that:

- Initial correspondence and pre-planning timeframes (before arriving in the field) did not work/function effectively;
- Recruiting participants for focus groups through a third party did not provide unbiased samples; and
- The practical (cultural) issues related to the local society was crucial for the following aspects:
  - correspondence with participants of focus groups;
  - dealing with high level officials and politicians;
  - ethical implications (i.e. purpose of the research, getting consent, stakeholder engagement, recording, taking photographs).

Possible Solution(s):

To solve/overcome the above mentioned problems or practical issues, the following actions were taken:

- Potential participants were contacted again after arrival to the field and new dates for meetings were arranged. Therefore, fieldwork took more time than expected and it was necessary to be flexible about the timeframe and schedule for staying in the field.
- Participants for focus groups were recruited by personal connections. These kinds of connection with the potential participants' colleague or friend are crucial for recruiting the participants.
- Government bureaucrats are not likely to provide written consent. They will also not often provide information formally or allow any recording during interviews.
- Participants from the general public expect the researcher to solve a few of their problems (related with the research).

Finally, the methods for communication and collecting information, ethical issues of the research, etc. should be tailored to fit with the local socio-cultural contexts.

Name(s): Nicholas Loubere

Institution(s): University of Leeds, White Rose East Asia Centre

Title: **Gānbēi (Bottoms Up): Navigating the Chinese Drinking Culture during Empirical Fieldwork**

Practical Issue:

Social networking in China is often accomplished through group dinners/lunches organised by colleagues, ex-classmates, friends or family members. Drinking is usually an important part of these gatherings as a means of showing friendship, respect and strengthening social ties. The traditional drink of choice is a strong rice spirit (40% alcohol or higher) known as báijiǔ (白酒), which is served in small glasses. Custom dictates that people offer toasts to each other (gānbēi or 干杯) and then prove that they have completely finished their drink by holding the glass upside down. Depending on the number of people involved in the meal this can result in vast quantities of alcohol being consumed by everyone involved.

For the outside researcher this poses a number of issues in addition to the obvious health risks involved with this sort of binge drinking. Primarily, these meals/drinking sessions are quite often the only chance a researcher will have to conduct necessary interviews. Moreover, meals like this can occur unexpectedly. A researcher may be anticipating a one-on-one interview with an important subject when, in fact, a meal has been planned effectively turning the interview into an alcohol infused focus group. This not only results in shoddy inebriated interviews, but also raises ethical questions regarding the use of information gleaned from subjects under the influence. Finally, since guests are (almost) never allowed to pay, the hosts may have expectations of the researcher that he/she does not fully understand and could significantly impact future access to the field.

This situation can obviously be problematic; however, the savvy researcher can also utilise this opportunity to discover information that may not be so freely shared in more formal interviews while, at the same time, strengthening social connections with important local actors.

Possible Solution(s):

Depending on the situation, the researcher can react to this issue in a number of ways. Below I outline three methods that I have used with varying degrees of success.

1) *Don't drink*

For this to work the researcher will need a good excuse and to maintain his/her non-drinking stance for the duration of the fieldwork. Male researchers (more so than females) will often face some pressure to drink. As the meal wears on, this pressure will undoubtedly increase.

2) *Drink but don't "Gānbēi"*

This option involves drinking, but continually refusing to 'down' one's glass during the toasting sessions. As this could seem very rude, it is advisable to use self-deprecation and flattery (i.e. "I am not able to drink as much as you"). Another option is to only drink beer with the excuse that báijiǔ is too strong.

3) *Dive in head first*

The decision to fully embrace the Chinese drinking culture should not be taken lightly. Báijiǔ is an acquired taste and practice is recommended. The ability to successfully match Chinese hosts in a dinner/lunch drinking session will certainly earn the researcher respect (and possibly result in more open and friendly subjects), while raising the ethical and research quality issues mentioned above.

SECTION II:

SILENCED VOICES:
OPENING UP NEW PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT

Name(s): Ulrike Immler

Institution(s): University of Bradford

Title: **Valuing Capabilities in a Changing Environment: A Case of Peri-urban Communities in Tamil Nadu, India**

Practical Issue:

What people consider important or satisfying at one point in time might change under altered circumstances and at a different time. Influences stemming from the living environment are likely to have a bearing on the development and changes of values, attitudes and behaviour. The aim of my research is to capture how perceptions and values of communities in Tamil Nadu with respect to individual livelihood and personal development strategies might change over time and what drives these changes. There is a further interest in the extent to which the economic growth dynamics of the nearby city have a direct bearing on local livelihoods and personal development choices.

The Issue

The research needs to capture different perceptions the participants have with regards to different aspects of their lives and for this an effective communication strategy is needed. To share an honest opinion one has to feel safe enough to do so and it might not be the norm to be honest with a stranger who is interested in one's life. Why would the interviewee want to share with the researcher what he/she values? Why would anyone share what livelihood strategies they use? Or what they consider important or what they are influenced by?

My research relies mainly on face-to-face interviews for gathering data. Thus the choice of technique should allow the participant to relax and open up about their lives without feeling that the researcher wishes to extract information from them for selfish or other hidden purposes. It should enable them to participate effectively in the interview process.

Thus one factor that can directly influence the research outcomes is the approach to interviewing. The circumstances under which the interview is conducted, the language used and time allocated all can influence the quality of responses significantly.

Possible Solution(s):

The suggested solution to this problem is the adoption of a narrative interview as a research method. This mainly employs open ended questions and gives the interviewee the opportunity to develop a narrative of their own and endows them with a large amount of creative control over the process. One of the strengths of narrative interviewing is that the participant has the freedom to express her/himself. In this way subjective attitudes and values can be articulated. This is particularly the case if the participant feels safe and important or empowered, which is something the narrative interview technique also allows for. The participant feels important since the time for the interview is specifically dedicated for the participant to express her/himself.

Name(s): Cristina Cleghorn

Institution(s): University of Leeds, Faculty of Medicine and Health

Title: **Communication with Participants: Interviewing Women in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Practical Issue:

I conducted my PhD fieldwork in rural Tanzania between May and July of this year (2012). The majority of the data was collected by interviewing the female head of household. Due to the gender dynamics in the villages I worked in, it was often difficult to speak solely with the female head of household.

Husbands, other relatives and community members often answered questions directed at the female participant or would tell the participant how to answer the questions. Comments about the female participant not having the necessary language, skills or knowledge to answer the questions were common. This problem was compounded by the fact that in this environment it was difficult to speak to the participant in private so there were many people present at the interviews.

This issue has the potential to impact research quality in a number of ways. Firstly, it conflicts with the rationale for selecting females as respondents and decreases the amount of relevant responses collected. Also, as the amount and type of interference was different for different interviews, this lack of consistency between interviews led to less comparable results. A linked issue is the effect that the presence of husbands, family members and other community members has on the honesty of the answers the participant gives.

Possible Solution(s):

I developed a number of techniques throughout the course of my fieldwork to try to overcome this problem and I believe these solutions could be useful in research encountering similar issues.

It is important to state, as many times as necessary, a clear and simple justification as to why you want to speak to your intended participant and why it is important she answers for herself. Stating that all other interviews had female participants and for this interview to be comparable the female head of household must respond was a useful strategy. Addressing the intended respondent by name before each question and facing the respondent was helpful in some interviews.

Additionally, strategies to conduct the interview in private, such as conducting interviews away from the home or setting up privacy screens may have been helpful, something my research did not attempt. The most helpful technique found in this project was to involve the husband in the research away from the interview. This meant having the husband show one of my Research Assistants the household farm while I interviewed the wife. This was very successful; they felt involved without compromising the results of the project.

Name(s):	Elizabeth Wardle
Institution(s):	University of Manchester
Title:	**Just Asking? Giving Voice to Hard to Reach Children**

Practical Issue:

The argument that children's work must be understood from the perspective of working children is often made on the grounds that children have agency and are able to assess on their own terms the harms and benefits of their work. My PhD research questions this approach by examining how children's responses to harm in their work are related to their social situations and experiences.

My empirical research was about children working in construction in Cotonou, Benin and Bengaluru, India. As I am interested in children's perspectives, it was important to work with them directly. I am also interested in how their responses to harm in their work relate to their social situations, so it was also important to work with many children in order to comprehend diversity among them.

The standard approach to the study of children's agency is ethnographic. Many researchers advocate using participatory methods. These methods would have allowed me to work only with a small number of children. They would have called possibly unwelcome public attention to them. They might also have affected working conditions or, and worse, created attachments inducing children to hope for assistance. A survey would have been impossible because of the numbers of children working in construction, their mobility, their scarce free time and the time needed to try to ensure they gave meaningful consent. Moreover, as I had expected, the children were vulnerable: all were socially isolated, physically deprived and dependent on employers. Approaching them in a way unlikely to cause repercussions but which allowed for personal exchange meant conducting short interviews out of work hours.

Possible Solution(s):

To accommodate both these logistical and ethical data collection constraints and my research purpose, one of my main methods was qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). This involved exploring whether certain combinations of social conditions - including age of beginning work, relative poverty, schooling, social relations – could be causally related to children being critical, or not, of their working situations and prospects. The analysis helped me establish that most of the children who had particularly difficult circumstances and/or limited alternatives expressed contentment with their work and confidence in their future.

This finding in itself indicates an important advantage of using QCA in research featuring children's involvement: it is not centred on an attempt to represent children's 'authentic' voices, which might credit children's speech unduly as the best way of learning about them. By focusing on summarised and specific (mostly material) conditions and outcomes, I was unlikely to be inclined to attribute 'more' agency to those who spoke well or were positive about their work. I could, however, still draw on the children's own detailed explanations to get a sense of their perspectives, as well as on my observations of their physical manner and reactions to my questions. Furthermore, the duress of their work meant there would have been no sustained opportunity for the children to use their involvement to their advantage: participatory methods in this context would have been dishonest. However, because I did spend time with them, the children were at least able to ask me questions and initiate discussion based on their own interests.

In brief, reflexivity in the context of my research meant being aware that much is at stake in 'listening to children' and trying to make sure that my methodology was suited to the nature of the available data.

Name(s): Dr.Sharada P Wasti[1], Dr.Padam Simkhada[1], Prof. Edwin van Teijlingen[2]

Institution(s): School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), University of Sheffield[1]
School of Health & Social Care, Bournemouth University[2]

Title: **Ethical and Practical Challenges in Conducting Fieldwork on a Sensitive Topic (HIV) in Nepal**

Practical Issue:

I have experienced a number of practical issues and challenges while conducting fieldwork for my PhD thesis in Nepal at the end of 2009. The key issues that arose involved gaining access to and conducting interviews in hospitals in Nepal, especially in out-patient departments.

Obtaining access to people living with HIV was a major challenge. I faced difficulties getting approval/support for the research because HIV is a stigmatising and sensitive issue in Nepal, and research is still not considered a priority area. Delays increased the costs of research and shortened the time available to complete the fieldwork. Without obtaining written approval from the hospital director, it was not possible to start and the absence of such a key person on the days of fieldwork caused delays in obtaining approval and consequently resulted in delayed data collection.

Ethical issues and challenges inevitably arose during the fieldwork. Confidentiality was a major issue, and conducting interviews in out-patient departments made recruitment difficult due to lack of privacy.

Possible Solution(s):

I used my diplomatic skills to get approval and support for the study. An inordinate amount of time and effort was invested in explaining the project as well as convincing people of the importance of the research. Meanwhile, I had to use my personal network (senior officers at the central level) to get permission on time.

I used a situational approach to comply with ethical guidelines for sensitive research in the context of people living with HIV. Some interviews were conducted in an open space since it was not possible to arrange separate rooms for them. I tried my best to provide a separate interview area to maintain privacy, confidentiality, and to prevent any disturbance and/or others overhearing the discussion. I also made some requests to the clinic attendants/security, who helped me prevent people from walking through our interview space. They fully cooperated and helped when we had to conduct the interview in an open space.

Understanding real-world barriers to fieldwork involving sensitive study groups (i.e. HIV infected people) may help PhD students to plan and conduct research activities more efficiently.

SECTION III:

HOT POTATOES AND HUSHED VOICES:
DIFFICULT RESEARCH ENVIRONMENTS & SENSITIVE TOPICS

Name(s): Steve Orchard

Institution(s): University of Leeds
Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy (CCCEP)
Sustainability Research Institute (SRI)

Title: **A Matter of Transparency: Coping with Corruption in Vietnam**

Practical Issue:

The following is an account of allegations of corruption made while conducting research in a commune on the north coast of Vietnam. Upon arrival, the Chair of the local People's Committee kindly arranged for a local family to host my visit, providing food and accommodation throughout my two week stay. The host family's house was larger than surrounding houses, and neighbours explained that the family had once been successful in aquaculture farming but had lost everything due to a storm that caused great damage to the area some years ago. As the research developed, it emerged that an extensive network of commonly owned mangrove forests had once surrounded the entire commune. However, large portions of forested area were sold to investors from nearby provinces who converted the land for aquaculture. The land had allegedly been sold or allocated to the close friends and family of the then Chair of the People's Committee. Local people protested against the perceived auctioning off, degradation and pollution of the land and resources they depended on for their livelihoods, and many believed that the conversion of the forest was the cause of increased damage from storms. The then Chair was found guilty of charges of gross corruption and forced to resign. It transpired that the husband of my host family was the brother of the individual found guilty of corruption, and some interviewees attributed his large house and successful aquaculture venture to this family connection. Furthermore, my host had spoken with his brother, who had heard about my research and visit, and he was keen to meet me. Following this meeting, there was an eruption of allegations of corruption made between various interviewees. This created a danger of becoming fractionalised within the community, making it difficult to collect data, and remain impartial and objective.

Possible Solution(s):

Two main solutions were useful in this situation. Firstly, debate surrounds what actually constitutes corruption, with common classifications including political, legal, financial and business. Hence, dealing with allegations of corruption necessitates an understanding of its various forms within a given context. Furthermore, inadequate state services, weak administration, deficient supervision, dysfunctional institutional arrangements and outdated laws can lead to corruption. Therefore, an engaged and rigorous knowledge is required of the cultural and institutional settings in question. For example, in Vietnam public officials expect to be given appropriate gratuity for their services, which is a relic of the Confucian system where payment was made in kind (conventionally in money). This mode of operation is usually regarded as corruption in the West. Furthermore, Confucianism eliminates any obligation towards others outside the family unit, commonly interpreted to as nepotism in the West. Secondly, reliable data on corruption can be limited. The integrity of the accused and accuser may be suspect, and the distinction between corrupt and incompetent behaviour can be blurred. Such settings can be confusing and lead the researcher to question who or what to believe. For the purposes of this research, it was useful to remember that it was not my position to pass judgement or to look for an objective truth, but to investigate how different groups in society perceived the same event.

Name(s): Dr Joshua Olaniyi Alabi

Institution(s): University of Leeds

Title: **Flexibility of Approach and Better Responses in Fieldwork**

Practical Issue:

During the course of my fieldwork in Nigeria, I encountered some challenges getting the best responses from the various groups: i.e. government officials, local elites, militants, members of civil societies, and officials of international oil companies (IOCs). This is largely because my research includes issues of corruption in the management of oil revenues and allocation to the various governments at the federal, state and local levels.

One such challenge is the use of a voice recorder during interviews. I discovered that government officials don't like the use of recorders during the interview process and when a recorder is present they won't give true and accurate information when asked critical questions. A good example is when I posed a question to a group of four top managers of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) that "despite the huge amount of funds totalling billions of US dollars, why are the refineries still not working"? Answers came simultaneously from a few of them "do you want to hear the correct answer or the official one"? I said that I want the correct answer, then the team leader said "put off the voice recorder because we are all civil servants, and I don't want anybody to sack me from my job"

Then they opened up and revealed major issues behind the challenges causing the breakdown of refineries and fuel scarcity. Other vital information highly relevant to my research was also released.

Possible Solution(s):

One major practical solution to this issue is to observe the mood and also understand the position of your respondents, and deal with them on a case by case basis. In my own experience, top government officials, civil servants, and IOC officials were apprehensive because whatever they said could be leaked or get into the hands of the press, and if it was recorded they would not be able to deny saying it. They might lose their jobs because of the sensitive nature of the answers they gave to me.

I obeyed their instruction to turn off the voice recorder and was able to get the vital information I wanted. I wrote as many notes as possible by slowing down the conversation.

Name(s): Jérôme Drevon

Institution(s): Durham University

Title: **Ethical Commitments and the Security of the Interviewees in Political Violence Research**

Practical Issue:

My fieldwork in Egypt has highlighted the importance of adopting strong ethical commitments to protect the security of my interviewees. This long-term immersion with militants, former militants and sympathisers of Islamist armed groups has indeed raised many questions that were not comprehensively comprehended initially.

The main issue was to find a balance between the researcher's thirst for information and the security constraints on the interviewees. The nature of ethnography easily leads to the development of closer relations with the subject of study and the emergence of friendship and trust. The status of the researcher therefore evolves from that of a neutral observer to a friend, and his position as an interlocutor becomes distorted. At that time, his interviewees might no longer be aware that the researcher is still studying them, and that they might be releasing information that could potentially threaten their personal security.

This issue was raised on four occasions. First, some militants progressively recognised a bigger involvement in armed violence than previously acknowledged by the State and claimed responsibility for some actions that could land them in jail. Second, other militants were still being prosecuted and judged for their involvement in armed groups being studied by the researcher. Third, the researcher met European Muslims closely associated to Egyptian militants recently involved in armed violence in Afghanistan. Last, young salafi jihadi supporters repeatedly expressed the desire to go to Syria to join the armed rebellion to the regime. In these four cases, where shall the researcher set the limits between his research and the security of the interviewees?

Possible Solution(s):

The first lesson is to prioritise the security of the interviewees and to regularly reconsider the implications of the proximity developed with them. The closer one is to his subject of investigation, the more careful he has to be with regards to the information that he is given and to its subsequent use. He always has to be aware that the people he is interviewing might not be fully aware of the risks that they are taking. Therefore, he should not consider his original agreement with them as perennial and boundless. It would indeed be a fault to assume that an oral or a written agreement permanently covers him ethically and allows him to use all the information subsequently given without any further examination.

Second, the researcher has to be fully transparent about his work given its security ramifications. He should never hide the nature of his research and should consider himself accountable to his interviewees, to his university and to anybody following his research. Therefore, he cannot, under any circumstances, collaborate with any security service.

Name(s): Scott Naysmith

Institution(s): London School of Economics and Political Science
The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

Title: **Theoretical and Practical Considerations for using Qualitative Methods in the Study of Emerging Infectious Diseases: Avian Influenza in Indonesia as a Case Study**

Practical Issue:

Qualitative research is necessary to determine whether incentives exist for at-risk communities to participate in interventions to contain and eradicate emerging infectious diseases. This paper draws from research on avian influenza in Indonesia, the world's worst affected country.

Investigating perceptions of risk and social responses to highly pathogenic diseases with ethnographic methods raises considerable ethical and practical implications, as the cornerstone of such methods are participant observation and in-depth interviews, both of which require sustained time spent in the respondent's environment and place researchers at-risk of infection. Questions arise: How long is too long for individuals to expose themselves in such environments for the sake of research? And, how do researchers negotiate a desire to be accepted by the community in which they work while avoiding environmental risks, such as shaking hands with those who sell and slaughter poultry?

Possible Solution(s):

Keeping safe in the field requires balancing epidemiological knowledge with social understandings of the virus.

First, know how the disease spreads and what environments (and seasons) are highest-risk, and share this information with the research team. Limit exposure and spend less time over longer periods in the field rather condensing research into a single extended visit. Vigilantly monitor the health of the research team with full awareness of how infection presents. Avoid at-risk surfaces and frequently wash with hand-sanitizer. Immediately launder all clothing following each field visit and scrub footwear with soap and water. Be aware of what steps need to be taken if an individual is deemed symptomatic.

Second, remain culturally sensitive but fixated on avoiding risk when possible. For example, instruct the research team to shake hands with respondents only when respondents present an open hand first. To ensure access, be observant of respondents' behaviour. This will help to inform acceptable precautionary behaviour for the research team. For example, while wearing masks and gloves – personal protective equipment (PPE) – assists in preventing the spread of avian influenza, the fact that PPE is stigmatized by at-risk individuals helps determine acceptable behaviour for the team and, ultimately, impacts research design.

SECTION IV:

TAKING SIDES: DEALING WITH THIRD PARTIES

Name(s): Elizabeth Carabine

Institution(s): University of Sheffield

Title: **Planning for Research Independence**

Practical Issue:

As a researcher in western Tanzania in 2006, I began undertaking surveys and semi-structured interviews with a community having had very little preparation or previous knowledge of the area and local issues. This was due to a lack of knowledge on my part and a lack of preparation on the part of project leaders.

I interacted with a range of third parties including the national, district and village authorities who granted me research permissions. Having very little knowledge of these processes, I unintentionally allowed my research activities to be influenced to some extent by the village leadership on whom I depended for access. Before I had consolidated my position in the community, my research assistants, schedule, and my interview questions had been reviewed and even modified by these local elites. By the time I interacted with the community, I believe I was seen as on the side of these elites and I am sure this must have affected my research outcomes. For example, I was invited to village meetings as a 'guest of honour' and therefore presented as close to the leaders. This effect happened very quickly and unexpectedly on my arrival in the village and was difficult to reverse thereafter.

Similarly, I depended heavily on local ecotourism operators for supplies, communications and general assistance. While I do not believe this adversely affected my position in the community, I felt that the impression of western people sticking together was not ideal.

Having experienced a range of different research contexts since then, I realise this is a relatively common set of issues.

Possible Solution(s):

I now believe it is important when entering a new study area to establish yourself as an independent entity, while developing essential relationships with third parties. I now take responsibility for developing a plan of how I intend to deal with third parties, e.g. how much collaboration I am willing to have, what favours I would be willing to grant or ask for, where I will accommodate myself, how I will choose research assistants, and so on. I try to identify and research stakeholders in study areas and familiarise myself with their roles and activities before I begin research.

In a fieldwork situation, it is easy to be drawn into relationships without foreseeing the implications for how these may affect your position and objectivity. By carrying out these early 'risk assessments', I have found myself more prepared to pre-empt these issues before they arise. For example, I would now question whether an invitation to a village meeting is appropriate, rather than feeling I should attend out of respect.

Above all, I have found that maintaining an honest, straightforward and transparent approach in my dealings with all involved has gone a long way towards averting such problems. In this sense, I find third parties will treat you as you treat them.

Name(s):	Gemma Sou
Institution(s):	University of Manchester Institute for Development Policy and Management
Title:	**Access and Evangelicalism: Methodological and Personal Difficulties**
Practical Issue:	During fieldwork in urban Bolivia I encountered methodological and personal difficulties when gaining access to my case site via two evangelical Christian churches. My involvement included attending services on Sunday, volunteering in their bible school and attending church retreats. This point of entry resulted in my initial interviewee sample being self-selecting, thus requiring diversification beyond the church. Second, church leaders were explicit in their wish for me to convert to evangelicalism, which raised feelings of guilt as I was not able to reciprocate their help with what they wanted of me. Third, I became frustrated by some of the 'extreme' beliefs that I was exposed to on a regular basis.
Possible Solution(s):	Two solutions which receive little attention in methods courses and literature were invaluable for ensuring that I diversified my sample and that I was able to enjoy my fieldwork experience too. First, 'soft skills' such as amiability and the ability to approach people opened up doors to other potential interviewees; whilst patience allowed me to cope with exposure to 'extreme' beliefs. Related to this I argue that the researcher is not simply there to be constructed by research participants as positionality is not static. A researcher's position encompasses more than being a 'white woman' for example, and he/she can be active in shaping research participants' perceptions of her/him through the use of such 'soft skills'. Second, I stress the importance of peer support via Skype and email during fieldwork.

Name(s): Henock B. Taddese

Institution(s): University of Sheffield
School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR)

Title: **Navigating through Ethical Approval Systems from Two Worlds: The Plight of the Development Researcher**

Practical Issue: Problems related to the ethical review process mainly emanate from a shortage of insight into the way of doing business in developing countries (development research) on the part of ethics committees in western universities on the one hand, and a lack of clear and well signposted processes in the countries of research in the developing world. In my research in Uganda and Ethiopia, the institutional ethical approval mechanisms here in the UK posed requirements that at times felt insensitive to the context where the research would be conducted. For instance, the utilisation of existing contacts to recruit participants proved to be a problematic issue for ethical procedures in the UK while it was critical for the data collection in the field. On the other hand, it proved hard to even identify the relevant and applicable ethical review mechanism once in-country in the said countries (different mechanisms exist) and the process thereafter presented many challenges. A major paradox in the ethical approval process in some countries is that sectorial ministries are supposed to review the project and approve it as a 'relevant and useful piece of work' as part of the ethical review process. This poses questions as to where the responsibilities of the ethical reviewers lie and results in a lack of clarity on the basis in which projects are vetted as relevant. At the same time, the ethical review committees meet infrequently at the reviewing institutions in developing countries and the processes are not very transparent with regards to the timeline for review and mechanism for recourse in case of rejection. These issues put the researcher at the mercy of existing mechanisms and add stress to the research experience.

Possible Solution(s): Ethics committees here need to actively seek to include people with international development work experience so that some of the contextual concerns can be readily understood and amicably addressed. Ethical approval schemes in developing countries are clearly highly underfinanced and poorly coordinated. There is a need for tailored, technical and financial support aimed at making the ethical review processes clear, robust, efficient and ethical. At a more profound level, there needs to be a paradigm shift from the view of the ethical review process as a means of policing researchers, to a more supportive scheme that seeks to understand the particular difficulties faced by researchers in different contexts and to support them to ensure that their studies are sound and ethical. Raising awareness of these difficulties and facilitating experience sharing would be a good place to start to effect change in this respect.

Researchers in Development Network (RiDNet)

The Researchers in Development Network (RiDNet) is a multi-disciplinary, cross faculty network for Ph.D. students and early career researchers working in international development at the University of Leeds. RiDNet is based in the Centre for Global Development (CGD) and aims to create a space where young development researchers across the University can share ideas and experiences, forge links with others working on similar topics or in similar areas, and provide each other with mutual support when facing the theoretical and practical challenges that come along with research/fieldwork in development contexts. Ultimately, RiDNet hopes to foster collaborative efforts that will result in joint research projects, and an increase in interdisciplinary publications and funding bids.

RiDNet hosts various events throughout the year - including seminars, discussions, workshops, conferences, and socials (see below) - and produces a number of useful resources aimed at helping research students and early career researchers overcome the challenges inherent in development research and fieldwork.

Activities

The Welcome Event: This event is held at the beginning of each academic year to encourage new and existing Ph.D. students working in the area of development across the University to meet and network.
The Annual Conference: In September 2012, RiDNet successfully held its inaugural conference entitled 'Conducting Fieldwork in Development Contexts: Reflexive Approaches to Practical Issues'. The conference drew participants from across the UK and Europe, and provided a great opportunity for research students and early career researchers to discuss practical issues that arise during fieldwork. Individual contributions to the conference are now published in the first volume of RiDNet's *Practical Fieldwork Notes*. Due to the enthusiastic response to the inaugural conference it has been decided that the RiDNet will host an annual conference on themes related to fieldwork. This not only will give RiDNet members a place to present their work, but also a chance to gain valuable experience planning and hosting a conference.
Brown Bag Lunches: Our Brown Bag Seminars are loosely organised meetings, focussing on the more practical aspects of doing research. Each meeting includes a 5-15 minutes 'kick-start' presentation followed by a 50 minutes discussion session. It is a great opportunity to network, to share concerns, and to discuss on-going research. Students gain insights into new and different ways of doing research by hearing what is and is not working for their peers.
Seminars: Seminars bring together PhD and early career researchers to discuss issues related to conducting fieldwork in developing country contexts and learn from others experiences. Many of the seminars are facilitated by a professional or senior member of staff at the university, or involve panel sessions with current and recent Ph.D. researchers. Topics include: the ethical review process, risk assessment, working with research assistants, and fieldwork preparation.

Resources

Many of our events result in the production of valuable resources. Last year RiDNet produced documents aimed at helping research students deal with a number of issues, such as: preparing for fieldwork, working with research assistants, and completing the ethical review and risk assessment forms. Additionally, RiDNet will soon post the first volume of *Practical Fieldwork Notes*, which is based on presentations from the inaugural RiDNet Conference.
Moreover, with support from the University of Leeds International Office, RiDNet is now developing an inter-disciplinary Fieldwork Map which will identify the international fieldwork locations and institutional connections of research students across the university. This resource will facilitate networking and enhance the potential for international institutional collaboration of Leeds students planning to undertake research abroad.
Resources can be accessed here:
http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/centre-global-development/about-centre/researchers-development-network/resources/

To join RiDNet email us at: Ridnet@leeds.ac.uk
You can also 'like' our page on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/RidNet
Finally, make sure to regularly check the website for updated event lists and resources: http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/centre-global-development/about-centre/researchers-development-network/