

## STEP 5

# Fieldwork activities and interviews



Cycling home with cut grass to be used as animal fodder, Cambodia

Photo credit: Jim Holmes/Oxfam

5.  
Fieldwork  
activities

Step 5 covers the EMMA fieldwork: interviews and other information gathering which make up the heart of the EMMA investigation. It includes advice on setting up and conducting interviews with different categories of informant: households, market actors, officials.

### Before starting Step 5, you will have...

- o determined the key analytical questions that EMMA is trying to answer;
- o decided your fieldwork itinerary, and organised transport and accommodation;
- o prepared agendas (questions and interview structures) for different categories of informant;
- o designed data-collection and response forms to assist the fieldwork;
- o rehearsed your interview methods and techniques.

## 5.1 Overview of Step 5

### *Objectives*

#### *Gap analysis*

- Confirm and if possible quantify high-priority un-met needs of various target groups.
- Verify your understanding of households' livelihood strategies and seasonal factors.
- Expose constraints on women's and men's access to and use of markets.

#### *Market analysis*

- Understand market-system structure, its conduct and performance prior to the crisis.
- Assess the effect of the crisis on the market system's infrastructure and supporting services.
- Understand the impact on different market actors and their coping strategies.
- Gather data about production and trade volumes, prices, and availability in the baseline and emergency-affected situations.
- Identify existing and expected constraints on the system's performance in the near future.

#### *Response analysis*

- Understand different target groups' preferred forms of assistance.
- Identify possible support actions that might strengthen market actors' coping strategies and encourage market-system recovery or better performance.

### *Activities*

- Interviews with larger market actors (wholesalers, importers, processors) in the market system
- Interviews with knowledgeable key informants (government officials, development-agency staff, economic consultants, bank officers)
- Interviews / discussions with a sample of women and men from target-group households
- Interviews / discussions with a selection of local market actors (producers, retailers, traders, employers) in the crisis-affected area
- Informal and impromptu information gathering (walk-through meetings and road-side conversations)
- Daily revisions of the fieldwork agenda, interview questions, and information priorities, based on review and interpretation of the latest information gathered by the EMMA team

### *Key outputs*

The outputs of this step will be recorded in three formats:

1. *Data sheets* – forms that systematically record quantitative data, for example:
  - estimates of the scale of target households' priority gaps (un-met needs);
  - estimates of baseline and current production, stocks, and trade volumes;
  - data on baseline and current prices at key points in the market system.
2. *Interview records* – notes taken during interviews and meetings, for example:
  - descriptions of livelihoods and coping strategies of various target groups;
  - women's and men's preferences for various forms of humanitarian assistance;
  - opinions about impacts of the crisis on people's businesses and the wider market system;
  - information about regulation and market-actor conduct – cartels and market power;
  - coping strategies reported as used by a range of market actors in reaction to the crisis;
  - bottlenecks and constraints reported or anticipated by traders.
3. *Other field notes* – EMMA team members' own insights and interpretations during fieldwork:
  - information about baseline market structure – including who is linked to whom;
  - diagrams or sketches of the market system, or of household income and expenditure profiles;
  - notes and observations for construction of seasonal calendars;
  - factors affecting different target groups' access to the market system;
  - views about the most urgent and effective possible forms of market-system support.

## 5.2 The fieldwork itinerary

Where, when, and with whom you conduct interviews will depend on many factors: on the geography of the market system; the time you have available; the locations of different market actors; and access constraints that the EMMA team face, due to security considerations, for example. What follows is merely a guide.

There are generally three investigative *arenas* for EMMA fieldwork in emergency situations.

1. *The emergency zone or crisis-affected area*  
This is where target households are located, along with local market actors (producers, retailers, traders, employers).

2. *Market-system hubs or trading centres*

These are major towns, ports, or cities where larger market actors (importers, wholesalers, processing factories) are located.

3. *The government administrative centre*

This is the closest major regional town or city where government officials, humanitarian agencies, and donor-agency headquarters are based, and other key informants are often found.

You need to divide the team's time flexibly between these arenas. With luck, the second and third arenas will coincide. In practice your itinerary will often be dictated by transport logistics, timing, and field-access constraints.

*First phase of fieldwork*

- Initial general interviews with larger market actors (wholesalers, importers, buyers)
- Interviews with key informants (government officials, sector specialists, local NGO managers)

EMMA teams should begin fieldwork in the market system hub(s), and the administrative centre if different. Talk to larger market actors (e.g. wholesalers) who have an overview of the market system as a whole; take account of the role of services (such as finance, transport), policy, and regulation.

During this first phase, you should also interview any key informants who can help EMMA teams to build quickly on the preliminary understanding of the market system and the emergency situation established in Steps 1 and 3; for example, government officials, local NGO managers, and sector specialists.

The main mode of investigation in this phase is structured interviews. Initially, the information agendas (e.g. section 4.4) will be rather broad, but they should be adapted to suit the individual interviewed. Remember also to use early interviews to ask about other contacts: find out who the other main market actors are, and where they are located.

Two or three days of investigation in these arenas, often outside the emergency zone, make excellent preparation for fieldwork in the crisis-affected area. After interviewing a few knowledgeable informants and market actors, EMMA teams should expect to return to Steps 3 and 4 to revise their key analytical questions and preliminary maps.

Note: returning to previous steps is a normal part of the EMMA process. Understanding of the market system and the critical issues builds up gradually and iteratively. EMMA teams need to reflect regularly on the information received from interviews (e.g. on a daily basis), and use their reflections to refine their lines of enquiry in subsequent meetings.

### *Second phase of fieldwork*

- Interviews with women and men in affected target-group households
- Meetings (and group discussions) with local market actors (traders, shopkeepers, producers)
- Informal roadside conversations and walk-through exercises

Fieldwork in the emergency zone is usually the most time-consuming phase, because of the numbers of people to be interviewed, and the logistics of travel. This is where a large EMMA field team can help – provided that each member is well oriented. The work involves interviews with a sample of women and men from different target groups, and meetings with local market actors (producers, retailers, traders, employers).

In general, it is best in any location to start by meeting local key informants – village elders, local government officials. This will avoid offending local norms and often leads to introductions to other important contacts. Then speak next to women and men in target households in the affected area – preferably separately. Afterwards, talk to the local market actors (producers, retailers, traders, buyers) with whom the target households say they come into contact, e.g. at local market places. A mixture of informal ‘walk-through’ conversations and more formal interviews is often advantageous.

There are advantages also in moving between different types of interview in different locations, so that varied perspectives enrich your understanding of the situation which you bring to later interviews.

After talking to small local actors, EMMA teams may find it useful to work back along the value chain or supply chain – following the links towards the larger market actors in the major trading centres and cities. This ensures that you focus efforts only on the market actors that are most relevant to the target population (see Box 3.6 about ‘optimal ignorance’).

### *Third phase of fieldwork*

- Follow-up interviews with larger market actors
- Follow-up interviews with key informants

After fieldwork in the emergency area, it is very common to find that further detailed questions and more specific issues will have arisen. These may require more information from larger market actors and key informants. For example, EMMA teams may need to explore the feasibility of specific activities that are emerging as strong candidates for response options (section 9.7). Follow-up interviews will usually be needed with key informants in the trading hubs or administrative centres.

***On-the-job analysis***

By now, you should have realized that analysis of the information and data collected in the field needs to be initiated during the course of the fieldwork. In other words, Steps 6, 7, and 8 ideally begin during the fieldwork. After every interview, and at the end of each day, make time to ask: ‘What does this information tell us about the key analytical questions that we are trying to answer?’

This thinking and reflection time is essential, and it is far more productive to reflect immediately when information is fresh, than wait until you are back at headquarters. Ideally, on a daily basis, teams need to...

- modify or re-draft market maps to reflect their evolving understanding of the system;
- check that the interview questions are still relevant. Modify them as necessary to reflect the most important gaps in your knowledge of the market system as the fieldwork progresses.

Be aware that as you gather and process information daily, you will probably add new interviews to your agenda and need to adjust plans and prioritize accordingly.

**Box 5.1 Daily checklist during fieldwork**

1. Update the baseline and emergency maps.
2. Update the seasonal calendars.
3. Summarise key findings from interviews / observations.
4. Complete / clarify your data sheets.
5. Review and revise your interview schedule.
6. Revise interview questionnaires / prompt sheets.

**5.3 Allocating available interview time**

There is never sufficient time to follow every lead, or speak to every person, so prioritization is essential. Work out how many ‘interview hours’ you are likely to be able to fit into the time you have available. This will depend on the number of days, travelling times, and the size of the EMMA team – i.e. how many interview pairs you can divide yourselves up into.

As a rough guide, you should allocate your available interview time (excluding travel time) in the proportions indicated in Box 5.2.

<b>Box 5.2 Dividing up your interview time</b>		
<i>Interview type</i>	<i>Share of time</i>	<i>Example</i>
Target-population households	<b>15%</b>	8 hours (12 short interviews)
Local retailers, traders, buyers, or employers	<b>30%</b>	12 hours (15 medium interviews)
Traders, wholesalers, major buyers, importers in trading centres, city	<b>30%</b>	12 hours (15 medium interviews)
Other key Informants, officials, etc.	<b>15%</b>	6 hours (6 long interviews)
Contingency and follow-up interviews	<b>10%</b>	4 hours

It is vital to keep some time available for follow-up interviews. As your understanding of the market system grows and you begin to consider the response analysis, you may well need this time to return to explore particular issues or response opportunities in more detail.

#### 5.4 Selecting whom to interview

Try and talk to as wide a range of people as time allows during EMMA fieldwork. Remember, however, that the EMMA process does not allow time for rigorous systematic surveying of households or market actors. At best, you will do well to speak to a small but roughly representative sample of women and men.



#### **Box 5.3 Appropriate imprecision**

EMMA cannot achieve the same sort of statistical accuracy as large surveys with dozens or hundreds of interviews. For example, suppose 20 people tell you how much they spend on rice each month. Their answers (averaged) will represent the wider population with only limited accuracy – perhaps plus or minus 10 per cent, at best.

Therefore, it is misleading to state the result like this: ‘average spend = Rs 72.30’. It is too precise. A more correct finding would be ‘average spend is in the range Rs 60–80’. If the sample is smaller (e.g. 10 people), the precision of findings will be even less: perhaps only plus or minus 30 per cent.

The best that EMMA can hope to achieve is a level of ‘appropriate imprecision’. Instead of large samples, assume that findings are only very approximate, and try to cross-check (triangulate) them against other sources of information.

The implications of this are clear in EMMA:

- Do not waste time trying to get very precise answers to quantitative questions.
- Do not use misleadingly precise results in your analysis.

### *Interviews with larger traders, employers, and buyers*

Aim to interview the major market actors in the market system who are outside the local affected area. This may include larger traders, wholesalers and importers, in the major trading centres and cities. It may also involve service providers (from transport and finance sectors, for example).

Remember that traders, like everyone else, may have their own agenda and their own reason for wanting to talk to you. In general, there is probably little to be gained by group meetings of larger traders, and individual interviews are usually much easier to arrange.

You will identify who these people are through various networks, including the following:

- logistics officers of humanitarian agencies and NGOs, who sometimes have data bases of major suppliers;
- government officials and other key informants, who may know who the main players are;
- local traders, retailers, employers, who may direct you to their suppliers and buyers.

Remember: when a major emergency response is likely or expected, traders may have a very large stake in the outcomes of EMMA. For example, they may claim to have supply capacity because they hope to get orders. EMMA teams need to reflect on what they are told. Do not assume that anyone can actually deliver on what they tell you, unless they have signed a binding contract. There is no substitute for using your best judgement and common sense.

### *Key informants*

Aim to interview any key individuals who are likely to understand the market system well, even though they are not trading in it themselves. They may include the following:

- officials in the local offices of Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, etc.;
- staff of major UN and humanitarian agencies, e.g. FAO, WFP, UNDP, etc.;
- market or trading authorities in trading centres; officials in Customs offices (near borders);
- local NGO development-agency staff, including your own colleagues.

Often it will be necessary to introduce yourself to local elders or officials to get permission to make enquiries in the area. This can be a good opportunity to investigate their knowledge of the situation. Remember it is not only these people's knowledge that is valuable, but also their access to other information – reports and studies. For example, localized market studies (i.e. relating to the emergency zone) may be available from district government offices or local NGOs. Some government agencies, World Bank staff, or NGOs may have completed sub-sector analyses for specific markets.



National baseline price and volume data for various commodities and other products may be available from governments (e.g. a Consumer Price Index), or other agencies such as WFP, FAO FEWSNET, USAID, and other NGOs.

In food systems and other agriculture-related market systems especially, you may be able to access national-level information on markets and food security from WFP market profiles, CFSVA and CFSAM reports, and data from FEWSNET and FAOSTAT and USAID Bellmon Analyses (see web links in Boxes 1.1 and 1.2).

### *Household interviews*

Aim to speak to a small but representative sample of women and men in target-group households. Do not neglect your agency's own staff: drivers, cleaners, and guards can be very useful sources of information. Ensure that your 'sample' includes, if relevant, households from different target groups:

- women and men from different locations, ethnic groups, etc.;
- households that represent groups with different livelihood strategies – farmers, wage labourers, fisher-folk, pastoralists, etc.;
- individuals representing different kinds of family structure – female-headed and male-headed, young, elderly, etc.

Ideally, interview women and men separately, representing up to five households from each type of target group, but this will depend on the diversity and complexity of the situation. Think about the timing and location of interviews or meetings. Women and men often have different daily timetables of responsibilities – for example, collecting water and firewood, seeking daily labour – which will affect whom you get to see and where it is best to meet them.

Remember: a small number of household interviews do not create a reliable picture on their own. Try to 'triangulate' (i.e. confirm) your findings by using at least two different information sources.

There are various ways to investigate information from households, and formal individual interviews are only one. Consider also more informal exercises such as 'walk-through' research in camps for refugees and displaced people – where discreet and brief conversations are held with random individuals as you wander around people's living areas. Although the information agenda (section 4.3) in such exercises may be restricted, this can be an efficient way to get a feel for the issues, needs, and preferences of a target population.

A slightly more formal investigation can often be done through focused group discussions, which can be a good way to hear lots of opinions quickly and spark new ideas (e.g. for response options). See the EMMA reference manual for further guidance on how to run focus groups.

### *Local market-actor interviews*

Aim to interview a diverse sample of local retailers, buyers, traders, small-scale employers, etc., depending on their relevance to the market system and your EMMA objectives. Concentrate on the people or businesses that are most significant in the local economy and to the critical market system particularly.

It may be easier to have an informal discussion with several smaller market traders at an open market. In fact, trying to restrict the discussion to just one trader would be more difficult. In situations where there are too many local ‘players’ to interview all of them, you should adapt your sample to focus on those who are reported to be the most economically important.

- Householders, wage earners, and producers (farmers) should be able to point you to the most important local people to talk to.
- Retailers and traders will identify others: their suppliers and their competitors.
- Local agency staff / colleagues – including drivers and security guards – will often give you a good explanation of how the local economy works, if you ask them.

Expect local market actors to be busy people whose time is valuable. They may justifiably be suspicious or frightened of strangers asking questions about their business. The key to successful interviewing is to build a rapport and gain their trust. Act with modesty and gratitude towards them, and do not waste their time with unnecessary or intrusive details.

#### **Box 5.4 Tips on interviewing local market traders**

*Timing:* Interview at an appropriate, quiet time of the day, e.g. early morning as a shop opens, or after lunch. Get some advice on when is the best time to visit. Limit the interview to a maximum of 30 minutes, especially if you turn up at a busy time of day.

*Avoid raising expectations:* Do not be tempted to reinforce people’s natural expectations that you are there to provide immediate assistance. Make it clear that EMMA is about assessment and planning. Make no promises of assistance at this stage.

*Use maps and diagrams:* Go prepared with a preliminary market-system map and seasonal calendar. Be ready to draw graphs to illustrate high- and low-season prices, for example. Update these diagrams together with traders, if they respond well to visual images. Encouraging informants to draw their own maps is a good way to get a more engaged response from interviewees, often revealing unexpected information that you might not have otherwise have looked for.

*Sensitive Information:* Respect interviewees’ privacy. Some information that you need is commercially sensitive (e.g. sales, profits), so do not expect answers to direct questions. Use oblique approaches: ‘What would a shop of about this size sell per week?’ Do not demand people’s names.

As well as formal individual interviews with local market actors, EMMA teams may learn much from brief and informal ‘roadside’ conversations. These conversations – with randomly encountered individuals working in the market chain, such as producers or vendors – may last only five or ten minutes. As with ‘walk-through’ exercises with households, the range of questions that you can ask may be limited, but it can still be an effective way to get a feel for the emergency situation and its impact on the local economy.

## 5.5 General advice on conducting interviews

*Be clear and realistic about your EMMA objectives:* before every interview, remind yourself of the key analytical questions to which you hope to find answers, and identify which topics are most relevant to this specific interview. Be brutally realistic about how much you can find out in the time available, e.g. 30 or 40 minutes.

*Avoid duplication and interviewee-fatigue:* be sure to co-ordinate with other NGOs operating in the emergency area to avoid duplicating interviews with the same traders using slightly different, yet related questionnaires. UN-OCHA often co-ordinates these activities.

*Team organisation:* use your team carefully. Have one person to ask questions and a second person to record responses in notes or on data sheets. Other team members can chat to and distract bystanders if necessary. The questioner should not write while interviewing. As in any normal conversation, she or he must maintain continual eye-contact, and demonstrate interest and appreciation of the interviewee’s answers. If a translator is used, he or she should be introduced, but the questioner must still speak directly to the interviewee throughout the conversation. Review interview notes with translator after each interview.

*Introduce yourself and your agency properly:* explain clearly your purpose at the start of the interview. You want to plan effective humanitarian programmes to help people of the area, without harming market activity, i.e. you are not there to check licences or for tax purposes. For example: ‘We are a study group from <your organisation>. We are looking at how communities affected by the crisis can get access to <critical product or items>. We want your help to understand the market for this product. We do not need to know your name, but please could you help us with some information?’

*Think ‘structured conversation’ rather than ‘survey’:* try to make the interview like a natural conversation, covering a few interesting topics. Do not make the interviewee think that you are only there to fill in a questionnaire. Let informants lead the conversation. Do not worry if you cannot cover every question in every interview.

*Use open-ended and non-leading questions:* in general, questions that encourage people to reflect and reveal details are best. Be a good listener. Avoid ‘closed questions’ that prompt simple Yes/No responses. And avoid ‘leading questions’ that simply invite people to confirm your own assumptions.

*Be flexible and spontaneous:* do not be constrained by your questionnaire. If you see or hear about something really interesting – if a delivery of new stock arrives, for example – follow your nose and ask about it. If you cannot get the information that you need directly, try other angles. For example: if a retailer cannot give estimated sales figures, ask them instead how many customers they see in a day, and how much a typical customer spends.

*Do not be distracted:* keep your key analytical questions in mind constantly, and do not waste your own or your interviewee's time going into unnecessary detail or exploring irrelevant lines of enquiry (see Box 3.6). For example, if you want to know the volume of trade in a particular location, you need estimates of actual sales from different traders. But if you only want to compare trade now with trade before the crisis, it is only the trend that matters (up a third, down a half, etc.), not actual sales figures.

## 5.6 Recording your findings

The most important task and difficult skill in interviewing is to record findings efficiently, so that you can use the information effectively later in analysis.

### *Taking interview notes*

- Take brief notes of key points in the meeting, rather than attempt to record everything that is said. Focus on information that is most relevant to the EMMA objectives (key questions).
- Physically organize your notes around the main topics of the interview as you proceed: for example, keep separate pages in your notebook for different issues.
- Read, check, and discuss any ambiguity in your notes with other team members, immediately after each interview.

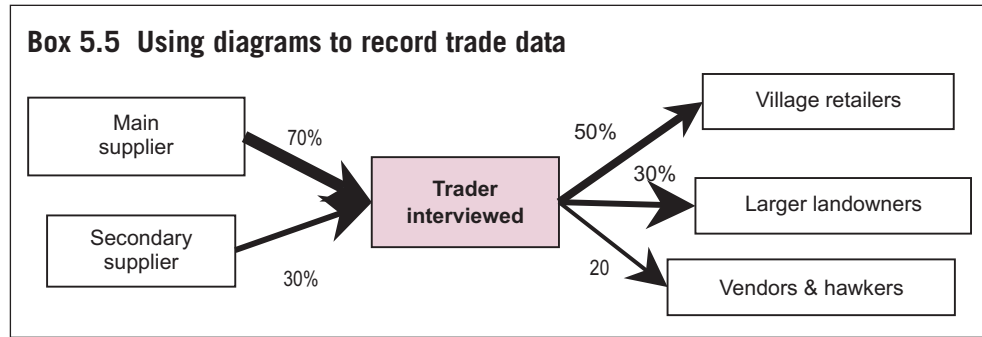
### *Recording data*

- Quantitative data need to be recorded systematically on a data sheet. Data sheets must be prepared in advance (see Step 4), tailored to the interview questions and type of informant.
- Local traders, producers, and households may often use traditional or non-standard units for weights and measures. Find out and record the conversion factors. Record what interviewees say, but convert this to standard units as soon as possible.
- Do not get bogged down in unnecessary detail – estimates and approximations are good enough. If people cannot or will not give you figures, you may still be able to record the direction or pace of any changes.

In Step 4, various pro-forma data sheets are provided as examples. These data sheets will not fit every situation: they need to be tailored to suit the particular market system and the specific type of market actor whom you are planning to interview.

**Using diagrams**

Often it is useful to draw a diagram during the interview to represent (and check your understanding of) information given. For example, the relative importance to a trader of different business linkages might be represented by a diagram like the one in Box 5.5. This kind of information is easily incorporated later into a market-system map.



5.  
Fieldwork  
activities

Similarly, you can record information about other factors (e.g. seasonal issues) in simple diagrams which you later incorporate into your analysis, such as a seasonal calendar. See Box 5.6.

**Box 5.6 Using diagrams for seasonal information**

Employers	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A
Price variations		Low					High		Peak			
Stock levels	High							Low				
Supply constraints						Roads flooded						
Labour availability			Low: planting							Low: harvesting		

***Field notes***

Field notes are general observations and other information about the impacts of a crisis on actors, linkages, and market integration that may not be captured on your questionnaires and data sheets.

*Observations:* your eyes can tell you a lot, and it is important to note important trends, changes, or events in your target area. Noticing these trends and applying them to the current situation is key to adjusting yourself for upcoming interviews, analysing the changing situation, and preparing possible interventions that are relevant and timely.

- Does this economy (the target area) appear healthy?
- Do shops and transporters appear to be opening and active? Is the market area vibrant?
- Who is using the market – women, men, which target groups?
- Do you notice distributions or other interventions?
- Is the target community utilizing or finding alternatives to the critical market system (income and supply markets)?
- Are certain livelihoods groups or ethnicities excluded from the recovery process?

***Checklist for Step 5***

- o Conduct interviews with target groups, women, and men.
- o Conduct interviews with local traders and producers.
- o Conduct interviews with employers, key informants, other larger market actors.
- o Update the baseline and emergency maps and seasonal calendars.
- o Summarize key findings from interviews, observations, notes.