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MDICP-3 Ethnographic Project: Assessing Community Reaction to a Large Scale Survey

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MDICP3 Ethnographic Project: Assessing Community Reaction to a Large Scale Survey

Field Report

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MDICP3 Ethnographic Project: Assessing Community Reaction to a Large Scale Survey[1]

Field Report

Introduction:

The aim of the study was to collect ethnographic data as a part of an effort to assess community reaction to the large-scale survey of the MDICP (Malawi Diffusion and Ideational Change Project). The aim of the project is to examine the role of social networks in changing attitudes and behavior regarding family size, family planning, and HIV/AIDS in three research areas in rural Malawi. Accordingly, ethnographic fieldwork based on participant observation was conducted for 5 months in a surveyed village before, during, and after an MDICP3 data collection round. In the course of the study an effort was made to collect data that may be of help in answering future questions regarding 1) community reaction to a repeating survey, 2) the status of gifts and gift giving as a research practice and 3), the acceptance, or unacceptance, of research standards and ethics by the communities at the heart of the survey.

The long-term aim of the study is to provide a complementary perspective on the work being done by MDICP teams. First and foremost on how the project is being perceived by target communities and sample populations, and second, on the part MDICP surveys play in day-to-day community lives. It is my hope that the data collected and made available in this report may help in the shaping of the coming MDICP data collection rounds and affiliated projects by offering insights on less studied domains.

The report opens with a description of the large research context of the MDICP aims and stages followed by a description of the area of research and methods of the present ethnographic study. A summary of the findings regarding the main questions follows. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations for future projects stemming from these conclusions.

Research Context:

The ethnographic project was conducted as a part of the third data collection round of the Malawi Diffusion and Ideational Change Project in 2004. The unique sample of the MDICP, focused on a return to the same respondents on each round of data collection, and the personal nature of the questions that were being asked--in addition to the supplement of biomarker collection and VCT--gave rise to questions regarding the respondents' cooperation especially in the current composition of the study.

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In the initial stages of the ethnographic project, a decision was made to focus on one of the three regions visited by the MDICP team. The Balaka district of the southern region was chosen due to its proximity to the towns of Zomba and Blantyre and due to its relatively high levels of development allowing better work conditions for a single researcher. The main ethnic group in the region is Yao, although Chewa, Ngoni and lomwe also populate the region. The most common kinship pattern is that of a matrilineal matrilocal family.

The village chosen for the ethnographic project was part of the southern region sample and was chosen by the ethnographer after 2 weeks spent visiting all villages in the southern sites. Its main attraction was its size. When the original MDICP sample was drawn in 1998, 31 women and their husbands appeared in the sampling lists. In the 2001 and 2004 waves of data collection, 22 and 21 of these respectively were interviewed (in addition, in 2004, a new panel of adolescents was also added). In other words, the villages was big enough that one could expect some variation in residents' attitudes to the MDICP—and other issues—but it was much smaller than some of the other villages in the Southern sample.[2]

The main ethnic group in the village is the Ngoni with small number of Chewa, Yao and Lomwe . Most of the village inhabitants practice Catholicism and affiliate themselves with the local Catholic mission. Although the village identifies itself, through its unique history[3], as a mostly Ngoni village, the Ngoni language is not used by its inhabitants who converse in Chichewa as a first language. Another interesting fact regarding the chosen village is that although it is populated mostly by Ngoni people who are patrilineal and patrilocal, the village adopted the common local kinship pattern and is, at large, a matrilineal and matrilocal village.

Economically, as in other villages in the area, people engage in subsistence agriculture, including mostly maize and other small crops as tomatoes and pumpkins.

Fieldwork:
Fieldwork was conducted for a period of 5 months between February and July 2004. The rationale behind the schedule was to precede the survey team and acquire knowledge of day-to-day life in the village and make acquaintanceships independent of the main survey. Fieldwork was to continue during the survey work, biomarker collection, and VCT in the village in order to gain perspective on the process as a whole. Unfortunately, due to delays in

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[2] I found it important to choose a village in which the sample would be large enough to influence village life but not too big so I would be able to meet people and trace the reactions of those who are not interviewed.
[3] As told be the village headman, the village was established by a group of Ngoni families who came from the north and settled among the Yao of the area.

the schedules of the VCT teams I was not able to observe the last stage of the study.

The study was conducted with the help of two alternating research assistants chosen to work as translators, language instructors, guides and key informants. Both assistants were local women who were high school graduates in their thirties with former experience in research work. None of the assistants had any experience in ethnographic work and both were trained mostly in the course of day-to-day work. It is important to note that the decision to hire local women was based first, on the need to incorporate assistants' knowledge of rural life and customs, and second, on the recognizable advantage women assistants had in communicating with other women.

Research assistants accompanied me in my daily work in the village that was based on the method of participant-observation. The daily routine of fieldwork included a meeting with the assistant, usually at the local trading center, a visit at the headman's house announcing our "visit" and, on many occasions, receiving an "update" on daily events and occurrences. From the headman's house we would usually walk to one of the family compounds and join them for the day whether for daily assignments or special happenings[4]. During those daily visits to the village we would engage in conversations with our hosts that included a varied range subjects. At time, these conversations would take the form of semi-structured interviews and at others they remained unstructured.

During the period of the ethnographic project the survey was conducted in the village followed by the biomarker collection visit. As mentioned before, due to a change in schedules I did not witness the process of VCT that was conducted a few months after I left the village. Thus, the following findings refer to the pre-survey period, the survey and biomarker collection work, and the period in between. I will discuss the subject of VCT briefly not as an observer of the process[5] but in an attempt to apply my knowledge of the village and the research processes in it, and share my thoughts about the implications of the delay of this stage of the study.

Findings:
The findings section of the report is aimed at answering three key questions regarding community reaction to large scale surveys as seen from an ethnographic point of view. The main questions are:

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[4] Daily assignments ranged from house cleaning and cooking to garden work and neighborly meetings while special happenings were visits to under 5 clinics, and preparations for special religious and social events.

[5] When it became clear that due to time constrains I would not be able to observe the VCT stage of the study in the village, I was generously invited to join the VCT stage held in Mchinji (at the site of the central region). Consequently, I was able to learn about the VCT process even though I did not have the opportunity to observe it in the village of fieldwork.

a. What can we learn from an ethnographic point of view about community reaction to a large scale and multi-staged study?
b. What is the place of gifts in the research process?
c. What can we learn from an ethnographic project about our ethics and work standards as researchers and employers of local staff?

a. Community reaction in general

The first question I was asked to answer in my work regarded the reaction of target communities to the MDICP. The implications of the question were threefold: Do people remember us, or in other words, is there a perception of continuity? Are we perceived as an interference of village life? And the unavoidable question, why do people cooperate with what we do?

1. Memory and Continuity

In the process of looking for answers to these questions I was surprised to discover that people remembered the MDICP former visits. Although most people could not remember the details, they did remember the group of interviewers coming to the village to ask people about AIDS and sexual behavior. Both respondents and non-respondents said the questions were of a personal nature and sometimes not very polite. Even more surprising was the fact that almost everyone I asked about the past visits remembered the gifts that were given to respondents (a bar of soap and sugar) and many could point at the houses of respondents.

The memory of past surveys plays a role in understanding the MDICP visits as a continuous process. People did remember past visits but were also aware of the connections between the visits. Respondents remembered the second interview was longer than the first while others indicated that they were a part of the first survey in 1998 but were absent in 2001. When I presented myself as a part of the project and told people about the coming visit they wanted to know if the same questions were about to be asked and whether the same gifts were going to be given.

Another indication of the way respondents, and non-respondents, saw the MDICP visits, as a process was their awareness of who was interviewed in the past, and as such is to be interviewed in the future, and who are the people who were left out. People knew the nature of the sample and in more than one occasion I was encouraged to try "new" people this time.

The insight that people who are exposed to the MDICP not only remember past visits of the project but also perceive it as a continuous process may be of value to future research. Thus, memories of past visits of the project and the awareness of its continuous nature are a part of the rapport that was built in the area. As such they should be seen as a crucial tool in achieving cooperation from surveyed communities as long as we remember to maintain them with care.

2. Interference with Village Life

In referring to the interference MDICP visits cause in the routine of day-to-day village life one should make a distinction between the interference to communal life in surveyed communities and the interference to the personal lives of respondents. On the communal plane, very small levels of interference were observed during the time of the survey and biomarker collection periods in relation to pre-survey period observations. On days of survey and biomarker collection non-respondents continued their routine and though "visitors" were seen on village paths or sitting with respondents, people did not consider their visit as an invasion and since many of them were local they were not considered out of place.

The interference caused by the MDICP visits on the personal plane, that is the interference to the lives of the respondents, was viewed in a different way than the interference of communal life. Past respondents, and even non-respondents reflecting on the experiences of friends, neighbors and family members, remembered past surveys as interference to the daily lives of respondents.

Two forms of interference were discussed concerning the actual act of surveying. The first, and more common, was the indication regarding the interference of work and the performance of daily duties. People remembered the survey was very long and detailed and mentioned that they were removed from their work for a long period of time which caused an interference with their daily work.

In addition to the interference with daily work mentioned by respondents another subject that came up as interference was the private and personal nature of the questions that were asked. People remembered questions regarding sexual behavior as embarrassing and, at times, inappropriate and as such causing uneasiness during the interviews, which increased the respondents' feeling of interference.

While the sense of interference caused by the nature of the questions, and even more so by the process of biomarker collection, may be unavoidable, the interference caused by the length of the questionnaire and its high levels of complexity may be refined. Setting a limit to the length of the questionnaires, that are getting longer with every round of data collection, and deepening the training processes of interviewers in order to properly handle the complicated parts of the questionnaires may be of help in diminishing the experience of interference at the personal level by decreasing the length of the interview process.

3. Why People cooperate?

If the process is time consuming, interfering with daily work, and at times embarrassing, why do people cooperate? The answer to the question of cooperation is more complicated then merely participation in a reciprocal relationship. Many of the respondents indicated that they cooperated with

MDICP personnel due to mere politeness. People felt it would be improper to refuse the visitors and on many occasions were asked by the leaders of their community to participate in the study. The combination of appropriate behavior and community leaders' support of the study made cooperation with MDICP teams the proper thing to do.

Another reason to cooperate mentioned by respondents and non-respondents was the fear of retaliation. On more than one occasion, people told me that since they were told the authorities conducted the study they were worried that refusal to cooperate may cause punishment or mistreatment in the future. Surprised to learn that fear of mistreatment by the authorities was one of the reasons for cooperation I inquired among past interviewers and learned that the association with the authorities was occasionally made by interviewers, against MDICP policy and training, in order to achieve cooperation from reluctant respondents. As marginal as this phenomenon may be, it should be taken under consideration and as such incorporated into the process of training. Threatening associations with state or regional authorities as a tool in achieving cooperation should be condemned in a clear voice. The given gap in power relations between interviewers and interviewees, and to an even larger extent between interviewees and the group holding the study is problematic enough without recruiting the threat of the authorities.

The last, and very important, reason to cooperate with the MDICP study deals with the issue of gifts. People knew, from past experience or from their neighbors, that participation in the study involved the receiving of gifts. As much as those gifts may seem small and symbolic to the outsider, in the poor reality of rural life some of those gifts were seen as a good enough reason to spend the day answering questions. Thus, besides being a tool to achieve cooperation from surveyed communities the issue of gifts should be investigated from a more complex point of view to which the next section of findings is dedicated.

b. Gifts and Gifting

Referring to gifts solely as a means to achieve cooperation oversimplifies an issue under dispute. The meaning of gifts given to respondents and the difficulties gifting procedures may cause should not be overlooked. Consequently I wish to introduce some of the issues raised by the exploration of gifts and gifting in the research process.

1. The Role of Gifts and Gifting in Research Work

One should not overlook the role of gifting in the process of securing respondents' cooperation. Gifts serve as an incentive for respondents to cooperate and for family members to help secure such cooperation by helping interviewers locate respondents and by motivating respondents to allocate the time needed.

Gifts can also play the role of icebreakers within the highly tense environment of an interview. The act of giving and receiving can be used to maintain a more relaxed atmosphere when given at the beginning of an interview and an act of friendly closure when given at the end. Choosing gifts of local value is seen as an expression of familiarity with people's lives and needs and, as such, helps in building rapport between respondents and the study's representatives. Therefore it is of importance to view gifts not only as a tool to secure cooperation, but also as means of creating a positive atmosphere.

While researchers may see gifts as a means to secure cooperation and a tool in shaping a positive atmosphere, many respondents see them as a simple expression of good manners. Just as it is customary to bear gifts when visiting a neighbor, friend or a family member, it is well mannered to do the same when coming to ask questions. To this respect, interviewers are expected to behave according to known customs even in an uncommon social interaction. The role of good manners should not be underestimated as the behavior of the research team is monitored by the community at all times and may affect its willingness to cooperate with future studies.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to describe gifts as being perceived only as an expression of good manners. In many cases respondents reported seeing the gifts as a form of payment for their cooperation. In such cases, gifts are seen as compensation for time invested in the survey instead of work and for the interference in daily life mentioned in the former section. Understanding the status of gifts as a form of payment may be important to us as researchers as it uncovers a new aspect of the relationships between researchers and communities of study. This aspect of the relationship holds some sort of material reciprocity which takes place while respondents' cooperation is measured in the well know phrase: time is money.

As part of a more abstract discussion about the ethics of research in developing communities, gifts can be seen as having a more symbolic role in the relationships between researchers and the communities of study. Gifts given by the researchers to people in target communities can be seen as a symbolic act of bridging the gap in power relations. It would be naïve, and even offensive, to think a pack of sugar or a bar of soap would mediate the immense differences between respondents in developing countries and researchers. Nevertheless accepting that we, as researchers, "take" people's time, thoughts and life stories and "give" nothing tangible to the individual and an abstract promise of uncertain future remedy to the community, might make it easier for us to make peace with the role of gifts in social research.

2. The Problem of Gifting
Nonetheless, gifts do not only solve problems but could actually be the cause of many. First, the role of gifts as an incentive may help achieve cooperation but at the same time the incentive may damage data quality as it may result in people's efforts to receive it even if the respondent is unavailable by posing as respondents. Non-respondents' desire to receive a gift may result in

pressure on the research team to include them in the study. Such pressure may be easy to ignore in many cases but may cause difficulties when originating from community leaders or the holders of official status in target communities.

A broader perspective on the problematics of gifting in the field raises the issue of community reaction to gifts that are given to only small parts of the community. As mentioned before, non-respondents were aware of the gifts that were given to respondents and at times expressed dissatisfaction at what they saw as injustice. From their point of view, they could not take part of the study even if they wanted to and felt deprived of the possibility to receive the gifts. The feelings of dissatisfaction in the community may make it harder for respondents to cooperate and for community leaders to support such cooperation. A solution for such a problem may be found in some sort of a communal gift given from the research team to the community as a whole. Taking such measure may be helpful in obtaining cooperation and consent from the community as a whole regardless of that given by specific people.

Another problem caused by gifting surveyed communities is the formation of unrealistic expectations as a result of the gifts. Target communities and respondents may see the gifts as a sign of long-term commitment on the side of the research team and as a result feel betrayed when the gifting stops or when there are delays or problems in gifting arrangements.

Problematic gifting arrangements, shortage in gifts, and any sort of mismanagement of the gifting processes may harm the researchers' credibility in the eyes of target communities. During the survey period I was approached more than once with stories about gifts being stolen by interviewers and withheld from respondents. As much as these stories are hard to verify and may be no more than local myths or an attempt to receive more gifts, they nevertheless damaged the credibility of the project's interviewers working in the village. Since the project's rapport in the village is fragile to begin with, gifts may cause more damage than benefit if not handled correctly. To avoid the problems caused by disorganized gifting processes, research teams must employ clear and transparent standards of gifting as part of the regularization of work standards throughout the project.

c. Ethics and Work Standards

Gifting processes are not the only issue that should be observed in all that had to do with research ethics and work standards. In the last part of the findings section I wish to discuss two issues in relation to our work standards as a research team and our ethics. In the following section I will discuss the issues of interviewers and timetables in an effort to summarize topics in need of special consideration.

1. Interviewers: The People in the Front

Our interviewers in the field are the people we place in the front. For the target community, they are the study and as such we should evaluate their role and performance extensively.

Many limitations exist when choosing a team of interviewers in the field, but one should always remember the importance of the role they play. Unqualified or unsuitable interviewers may harm not only the data they collect but also respondents' readiness to cooperate. When asked about the interviewers they met, people tend to remember interviewers' gender and age and in some cases bind interviewer's biographic characteristics with their own willingness to cooperate. Respondents mentioned that the nature of the questions that were being asked during the survey stage made it more important for them to be interviewed by a person they felt comfortable with. Aside from the gender factor that was mentioned by many, and to my knowledge was highly monitored by the supervising teams making sure female respondents were being interviewed by female interviewers while male respondents were interviewed by male interviewers, other characteristics were brought to my attention by the people I talked to. For instance, older women found it uncomfortable to be interviewed by young women as it is considered inappropriate to discuss personal issues such as sex and marital behavior with a younger woman. To my inquiry regarding younger woman you can discuss such issues with, most women indicated professionals such as nurses, teachers and other health care professionals as appropriate interviewers. To a lesser extent, interviewers from the same age group as the respondent were perceived as fairly appropriate to interview their age mates on such issues.

Other characteristics that came up as influencing respondents' cooperation were the ability to use the local language fluently, to which the project was highly sensitive in choosing interviewers and shaping questionnaires, and the overall manners of the interviewers. Due to respondents' feelings that the questions they were asked were in many cases personal and private, interviewers behavior became a very important element. I was told about incidents in which interviewers were chased out of homes for asking "rude questions". A woman of relatively high social status refused to cooperate with the nurse during biomarker collection because she thought it was rude to ask someone of her status to do so.

As one can see, there is often a tendency to project from the questions to the interviewer and consequently to see the interviewer as ill-mannered if the questions he asks are regarded as inappropriate. Thus, it is important to us not only to make sure our interviewers are prepared to deal with such responses but also to train them to help respondents separate the personal nature of the question from the person in front of them through understanding the value gained from such questions. A process of that sort may solve problematic interactions in which interviewers are perceived to be

ill mannered and therefore do not obtain cooperation from respondents even when they do speak the local language and are fluent in local customs.

Employing local interviewers in each of the sites, as being done by the MDICP, is highly appreciated by local communities. Due to the scarcity of employment opportunities MDICP's decision to support target communities by supplying them with jobs in the project is acknowledged by the communities and has an influence on communities' sense of obligation to cooperate. The practice of hiring local personnel goes a long way especially in gaining cooperation among the leadership who, in many cases, look for the communal benefits of their involvement.

Nevertheless, there is a need to adhere more strictly to the policy of not hiring people who are already employed in other jobs. Though it may look narrow minded to a stranger's eyes, people were very troubled by the employment of interviewers who were already working as teachers, local officials and health surveillance assistances (HSA) that managed to slip through the selection and training stages. To avoid those feelings of resentment, and the rumor-mill that follows, those in charge of interviewer selection should be more careful in hiring local staff.

The difficulties in hiring local interviewers are numerous; they should be high school graduates, fluent in local languages, English speakers and able to go through training successfully and MDICP decision to hire local staff in every site should be supported. Nevertheless we should be aware of the important role of interviewers not only in the direct work of data collection but also in the more abstract act of networking and gaining rapport which are highly important to protection of data quality.

2. Schedules
One of the first casualties of undertaking a large-scale multi staged research project in rural areas of a developing country is the schedule. Executing a data collection campaign the size of the MDICP3 data collection round with no adequate office services, unreliable equipment suppliers, and all of the difficulties involving work in remote areas such as transportation to sites, transportation of biomarker samples to laboratories, the difficulty of accommodating a large staff and keeping to schedules seemed, at times, next to impossible. The need to synchronize survey teams with biomarker collection teams and scheduling VCT demanded high levels of cooperation on behalf of all involved and a fair amount of luck. The MDICP sometimes had neither.

Nevertheless, we should be very careful in exonerating ourselves from our responsibilities in all that has to do with delays in schedules. As much as it is almost impossible to undertake such a project and not endure delays, extremely prolonged delays should not be acceptable without criticism. To conduct large-scale studies in developing countries a team must be flexible enough to adapt to circumstances and change schedules according to need.

However, can we really say that a 3 to 4 month delay in informing people about their health status is something we can condone?

As I said at the beginning, I was not around to see the VCT stage in the village because it was delayed and held later that year. As a result, the people we took samples from in June kept waiting for the results we promised until November. When I first raised the problem of our responsibility in private conversations I was told that there were many unexpected technical problems that could not be controlled by MDICP teams, and in any case, not much could be done since it was not our fault.

Unfortunately, it is our fault. When we test people for disease we have the responsibility to provide results even if we can do nothing else to cure them. The fact that our support systems failed and our personnel, writer included, had to return home for the academic year should do not justify such grave delays[6]. There are also hints of moral inequalities and double-standards. That is, we would have never allowed this delay in a similar study conducted in the U.S., Europe or Israel.

The care for ethics and work standards should not matter to us only because we support abstract morals, but also because in the research system build by the MDICP during the years we are obligated, and blessed, to maintain the relationships with the people with whom we work. An illuminating lesson for me was to realize that local residents judge us constantly. Nothing we do or say remains hidden from the communities we study, and our acts leave a mark influencing people's lives as well as our future work. Therefore, we should do our best, and more, not to leave scorched earth when we are done.

Conclusions:
a. Community Reaction in General
1. People tend to remember MDICP visits and acknowledge them as a continuous research process. Consequently, there is a projection from past visits to present and future ones. What we did in the past will influence how we will be perceived in the future.
2. MDICP interference in target communities' lives should be examined on two levels. On the communal level, interference of day-to-day life was hardly noticeable. On the personal level, cooperation with MDICP teams causes significant interference to daily routine. People tend to refer not only to the interference of daily work but also to a sense of personal interference caused by the nature of the research procedures due to the length of the questionnaires and the feeling of invasion of privacy.
3. Respondents indicated that their cooperation with MDICP teams is a result of politeness, as refusal to cooperate would be considered ill mannered. The combination of what is considered appropriate behavior and community

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[6] It is important to note that the responsibility for the delays and their implications was a product of more general organizational culture. It was not the fault of any single individual.

leaders' support of the study made cooperation with MDICP teams the proper thing to do.

4. Fear of retaliation from the authorities was indicated as a factor in some cases, when respondents were under the impression that the study was conducted by the government.

5. Gifts play an important role in securing cooperation from respondents. In many cases the gifts function as an incentive encouraging respondents to take part in the study.

b. Gifts and Gifting

1. Gifts play a more complicated role in the relationships between MDICP teams and target communities than that of a mere incentive. Gift may be icebreakers during the interview interaction, indication the study's knowledge of local needs and customs and thus play a crucial role in building rapport between the project and the communities it studies.

2. Gifts play a more symbolic role in bridging the gap in power relations between researchers and target communities. On this level the actual act of giving indicates recognition, on behalf of the researchers, of the need to reciprocate with respondents and as acknowledgment of the interference caused by the study to the respondent's lives.

3. Gifting can also create a large range of problems in the field. The desire to receive a gift may result in pressure on study teams to include non-respondents in the study. It can also jeopardize data quality in cases where non-respondents may try to replace unavailable respondents in order to receive a gift.

4. Gifting respondents may cause a sense of dissatisfaction among non-respondents due to their inability to join the sample and gain benefits.

5. Gifts may create a false impression of long-term commitments on behalf of the MDICP. As a result, feelings of betrayal may accrue when the teams leave the area, the gifting stops, or even when there are delays or problems in gifting arrangements.

6. Problematic gifting arrangements, shortage in gifts, and any sort of mismanagement of the gifting processes may harm researcher's credibility in the eyes of target communities.

c. Ethics and Work Standards

1. Interviewers play an important role in the project's success to gain cooperation from respondents. People tend to remember their interviewer's gender and age and in some cases interviewers' biographic characteristic may influence their own willingness to cooperate. Respondents mentioned that the nature of the questions that were being asked during the survey stage made it more important for them to be interviewed by a person they felt comfortable with.

2. Respondents indicated the appropriateness of the interviewer as a crucial factor in their decision to cooperate. Social customs defining the right person to talk to, other than gender and language, were age and occupation.

3. During the interview, and in retrospect, there was often a tendency to project from the questions to the interviewer and consequently to see the

interviewer as ill mannered if the questions s/he asked were inappropriate thus making the interviewer-respondent interaction tense and the whole experience socially undesirable.

4. The employment of local interviewers, and other personnel, at every research site plays a role in gaining cooperation from local leaderships and communities.

5. The interviewers we hire to come in contact with local communities are the front lines of the MDICP and influence the way the project is being perceived by them. Poor work standards, ill manners and mismanagement by these teams reflect poorly on the project as a whole, while knowledge of local customs, transparent work procedures and overall good impressions encourage cooperation.

6. Although some delays in schedules are unavoidable under such circumstances, it is important to be highly critical in regards to them as they undermine our work ethics and damage our credibility.

7. Everything we do as a research team in the field is being watched and judged by the communities we study. The way we are being seen by the communities influences the way the project is perceived and, as a result, the cooperation it receives.

Recommendations for future projects:

1. Since people remember the project and acknowledge its continuity, it is important to maintain proper relationships with the community during fieldwork and between data collection rounds.

2. As the length of the interviews is mentioned as one of the causes of the sense of personal interference, the length of questionnaires should be limited. In addition, interviewers should be trained to master the questionnaires in order to shorten the length of the interview.

3. Gaining leadership's consent and cooperation is crucial and should not be neglected, as it is an important factor in getting respondents' cooperation.

4. Interviewers should be clear in explaining the study's initiators and supporting institutions as well as respondents' right to decline cooperation in order to prevent the mere appearance of threat.

5. Gifts should be given to cooperating respondents in order to show appreciation. Local staff should be consulted in the process of choosing the appropriate gifts.

6. A communal gift may help secure cooperation from communities as a whole and prevent feelings of injustice on behalf of non-respondents who have no access to the material benefits awarded to respondents.

7. Gifting procedures should be clear and transparent to avoid accusations of mismanagement and corruption that might damage the project's rapport in the communities.

8. Interviewers play a crucial role in the study. Consequently, selection and training processes should be followed by considerations regarding gender, age and occupation of the interviewers. These factors should be considered when assigning an interviewer to a respondent.

9. Interviewers should be trained to deal with lack of cooperation stemming from the personal nature of the questions. Interviewers should be prepared to

confront the tendency to project from the questions to the interviewer and consequently to see the interviewer as ill-mannered if the questions he asks are inappropriate. Thus, it is important to us not only to make sure our interviewers are prepared to deal with such response but also to train them to help respondents separate the personal nature of the question from the person in front of them through understanding the value gained from such questions.

10. The MDICP should continue to employ local personal whenever it is possible. This procedure is valuable not only to the communities suffering from limited employment opportunities but also in gaining cooperation from the community and securing high data quality.

11. Although delays in schedules are unavoidable we should find ways to reduce them to a minimum. Delays in supplying answers regarding respondents' medical status should not be measured in months.

12. Infrastructures should be established in a timely manner and should not be handled by a small team with limited time. It might be a good idea to build a more permanent local staff to direct and operate procedures in order to reduce to a minimum the lack of equipment and delays in schedules.

13. It would be helpful to continue evaluating the different aspects of the MDICP mentioned in this report in order to improve our work and our relationships with the communities we study.