

Guide 3: Trader Interview Preparation

The trader survey should ideally be done by two people: one to ask the questions, the other to take notes and prompt for clarification if needed.

The first section of the trader form includes a general overview of the market. Get this information from someone who is likely to have this kind of information, for example, the officer responsible for collecting taxes, or the agricultural extension officer, or a large wholesaler. Make an appointment outside peak trading hours. The key informant target group for this information is market wholesalers. As these tend to specialise in different commodities you will probably need to speak to a couple for each commodity group. Questions for each commodity traded are included on separate sheets of the form, so you can divide up if your team is larger.

The usual “rules” that apply to all interviews apply to the trader interview as well. In general:

- avoid asking leading questions: “would you agree that food aid is negative for traders?” The problem with questions like this is that the reality might be the reverse: in Ethiopia traders benefited from food aid because they gained a larger profit margin on food aid sold to them by recipients than they did through commercially traded grain, for instance. But the leading question can influence the response.
- avoid closed questions (i.e. questions that lead to ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses). Use them sparingly – e.g. to check that you have understood. The problem with closed questions is that you won’t learn much. Rather than asking “is the market competitive?” you will learn more by asking: “tell me about competition in this market in terms of marketing grain” If the trader doesn’t understand what you’re getting at you can clarify with a follow up closed question: “for instance, are there one or two traders who dominate the market or are there many traders with similar market share?”
- If you want to **learn** about how the market works you will find out more by asking open and probing (exploratory) questions: “tell me about your trading experience: how long have you been trading? What opportunities and constraints do you face?”
- Progress logically through the interview; the trader will not be impressed if you jump around between different topics in a disorganised way and may end the interview sooner than you had hoped.

Note: traders are usually extremely busy. Explain clearly your reason for wanting to talk to them, but make no promises of assistance. Your objective is to assess the livelihoods in the area (including how markets function). The information will be used by decision makers to guide interventions that may improve livelihood security. You are making no promises of outside assistance or market intervention!

Write notes in a book (recording the name and type of traders you talk to); transfer the information to this form soon after the interview.

Checklist to guide interview

1. Introduction; Trader’s history; commodities traded, capacity, access to transport and credit, etc.
2. General: How markets function (explain which commodity (group) you are interested in)
 - Market map: markets that are linked to this market; flow of commodity from producer to consumer; marketing constraints and opportunities in good years and bad years.
 - Market competition: number of retailers, wholesalers dealing in similar commodities; profit margins at particular links in the chain
 - Market integration: (how traders get information about prices from different markets; transport and infrastructure influencing trade between markets; price incentives to trade
 - Market regulation: national and local policies (regulations) which affect how the market functions.
3. Staple food focus (if not covered above): supply in a “normal” year, a “bad year” and the reference year. Constraints to marketing and solutions
4. Prices that are indicative of a normal situation, an emerging crisis, a crisis.