

Basics of qualitative research in IWRM

January 2025



The qualitative research approach

- Ethnography
- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus Group Discussions
- Key informant interviews



What is ethnography ?

- Ethnos + Graphein
- Anthropologist's approach
- Entails fieldwork
 - Long period of observation
 - Direct interaction
 - An iterative, semi-structured approach
 - “Playing by the ear”
 - Keeping eyes and ears open



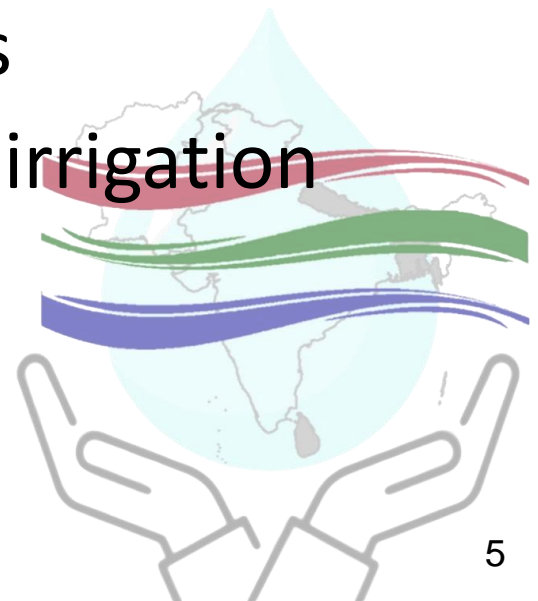
When is it suited ?

- Answer “how” questions ?
- Study of
 - Social movements
 - Occupations
 - Social interactions and processes
 - Deviant behavior



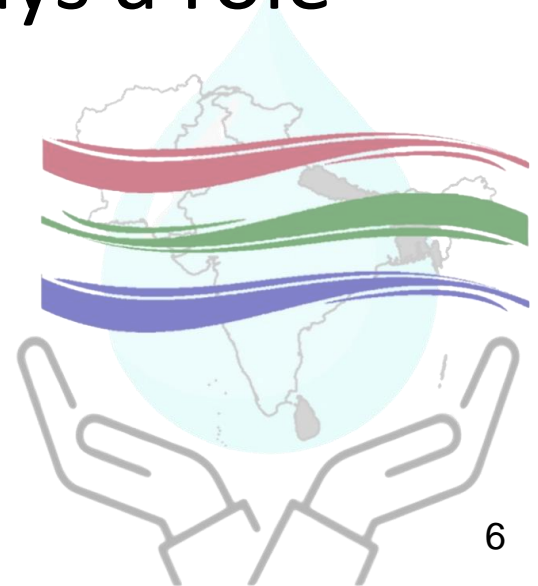
In the context of IWRM

- Study daily practices around water
- Processes of conflicts, co-operation
- Strategies employed by water users to improve their control over water
- Conflict resolution mechanisms
- Ethnographies of the state e.g. irrigation Department



Principles of ethnographic fieldwork

- Methodological pragmatism
- Naturalism
- Socialization
- Researcher's personality plays a role



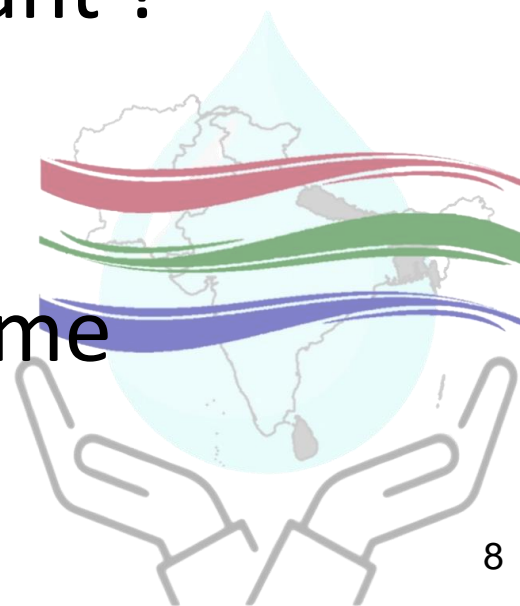
Steps in field work

- Start with a research question
- Defocus
- Select a site
- Dealing with gate-keepers
- Disclosure
- Listen, see and observe
- Regular field notes
 - Building blocks of field work
 - Analysis starts while in the field



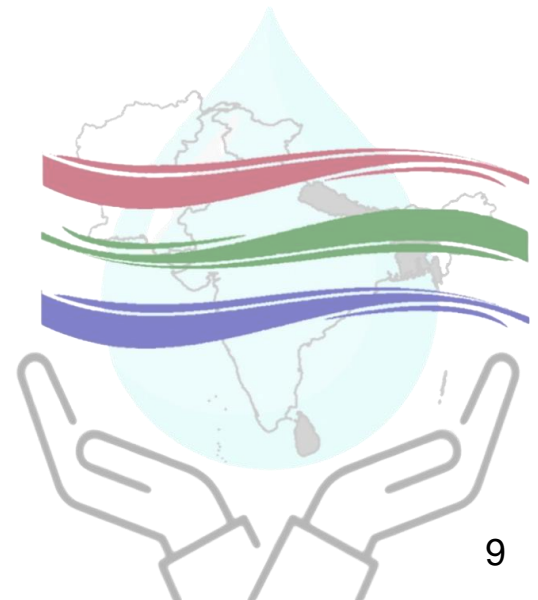
The key informant technique

- Who is an informant ?
- The informant interview
 - Semi-structured
- What makes a good informant ?
 - Familiarity with the site
 - Currently engaged
 - Some one who can give time



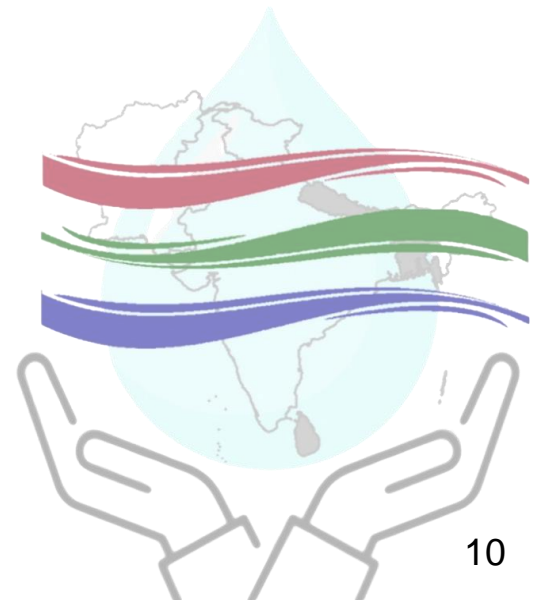
Who makes a good informant in IWRM research

- An engineer in the Irrigation Department
- A paatkari (Maharashtra, India)
- A former researcher



The semi structured interview

- Approach the respondent with a check-list
- Overall, broad questions
- Let the conversation evolve
- Ask new questions thrown up by the conversation



In the case of IWRM

- Take leads from field observations
- Start with broad, general questions
- Let the conversation evolve
- Pay attention to the respondent, even if what is being spoken about is not on your interview schedule
- Pay attention to words and expressions that keep coming up



Sampling in field work

- Theoretical sampling
- Snowball sampling
- Sample
 - People
 - Locations
 - Timing
 - Sample for relevance, not representation



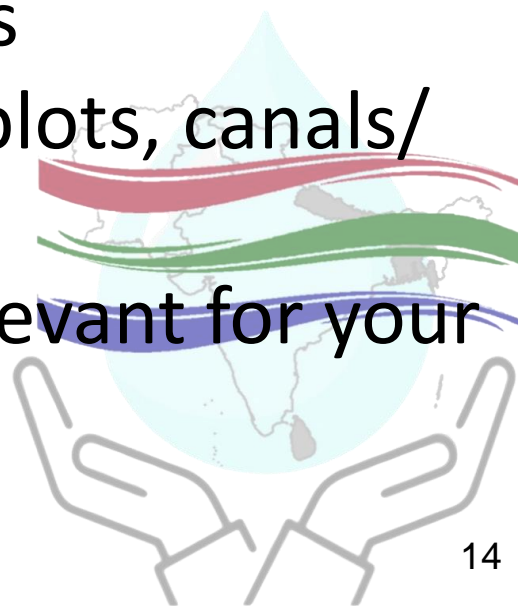
Observation and photos

- Observe what is going on, and investigate
- Click photos especially of artefacts and structures
- Click photos of people only with their consent, do not embarrass them
- If you wish to record interviews, take prior consent always



What it means for fieldwork in IWRM

- Be at the site at critical times
 - (different cropping seasons, day/night, times of scarcity/plenty, village meeting grounds)
- Be at the site at different places
 - (agricultural fields, irrigated plots, canals/ water sources)
 - Sample events and places relevant for your work



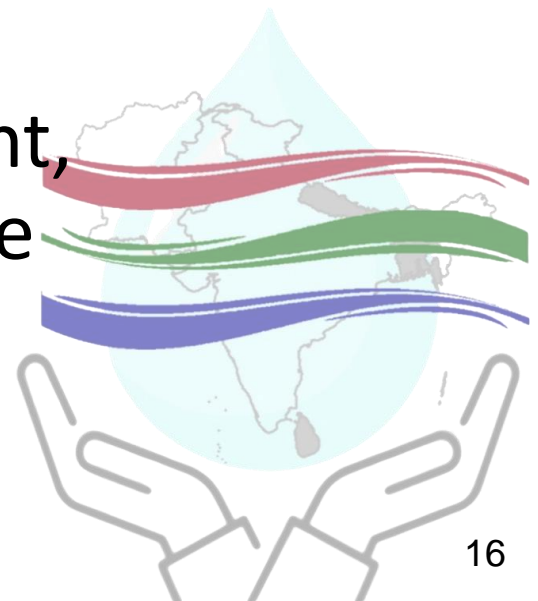
Focus Group Discussions

- Targeted questions at specific groups
- Select groups carefully, should be homogenous
- Selection approach should be driven by research questions and design
- Start with a check-list and let the discussion evolve



Cracking the jig saw puzzle

- Analyse evidences from the field to tell a story about water
- Assemble the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle
- The anecdotes, evidences, photos are tied in to tell us what is going on
- Use this to develop an argument, contextualise with the literature



Intricacies of field work

- Ethical issues
 - Extent of disclosure
 - Intrusion
 - Confidentiality
 - Dealing with deviants



Intricacies of fieldwork

- Managing stress
 - Physical
 - Mental
- When does field work end? When can you exit ?
 - When theory building ceases
 - Just call it a day ?

