

## Questionnaire: A Tool Of Primary Data Collection

- Biswo Kallyan Parajuli,

### Introduction:

Sociology/Anthropology is the study of social organization in modern society and of humanity. It is the study of society and mankind. It studies the change in social life brought on by urbanization, industrialization, westernization, tribalization, sanskritization, globalization, market system, education, technological advancement, and so on. It aims to observe and explain change and continuity in social institutions, value system, role and status, stratification, etc through different types of survey and research. In these regards research is considered as a component of the discipline of sociology/anthropology. Further more research and research activities are an integral part of any discipline for disciplinary advancement, advocacy, promotion and development. Researches are oriented towards offering pleasure of solving existing problem, satisfaction of discovering something new and contributing the wealth of human knowledge (Booth et al; 1995:2). The successes of research are reflected in maturity in tools construction and research process. The selection of appropriate tools and techniques of research, sources of data, skills of fieldwork, reliability and validity of measuring instruments and so forth illustrate the efficiency of a researcher.

The author of present article hopes to make the research students feel more confident and learn the skill of questionnaire construction when they take part in the practical field of research for their own independent research (dissertation writing). Therefore an endeavor is made to examine the few aspects of questionnaire as a research instrument.

### Research and Research Instruments:

Research is conducted to solve a problem and to expand knowledge. It is a systematic way of asking questions, a systematic method of enquiring (Drew C.J.: 1980). A systematic careful inquiry or examination done to discover new information or relationship and to expand, verify existing knowledge for some specific purpose is research. Such specific purpose may be academic or applied or both. Research endeavors are carried out through the helps of different types of research instruments. There is no one best method to use when collecting primary data for research work. Interview, questionnaire, schedule, case-study, life history, content analysis, observation, unobtrusive method, Participatory Rapid Appraisals (PRA), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), genealogical method are some of the important instruments of primary data collection in the field of sociological/anthropological research. The type of information needed, the time available and cost influence selection of a method or methods. Selecting, designing, and developing an instrument are critical steps in research work. Such instruments reflect the type and quality of data. While designing research instruments, the researchers should focus on the objectives and methodology of research and how they are going to gather needed information. The first step in constructing an instrument is to list out all the relevant and available types of instruments, then pick up few of them according to the objective of research. Such an instrument should be viable, economic, easy to handle and conceptually clear to the researcher. Questionnaire is one of the economic, easy, broadly accepted and common research instruments used in social science research. Therefore an attempt is made to highlight few aspects of questionnaire herein.

### Questionnaire: Meaning and Definitions

It is one of the most popular and widely used techniques of data collection. Generally when the universe is vast and informants are scattered widely inaccessibly questionnaire is one of the best

instrument to collect the primary data. It is a method to collect data and information in social research, in which information is obtained with the help of well-prepared questionnaire. A questionnaire is a form containing a series of questions and providing space for their replies to be filled in by the respondent on their own. The researchers do not go to any respondents for the collection of information but through the help of a set of questions or items the required information is collected. It is an instrument containing the questions in a self-administered survey (Schutt: 2001). The questionnaire design emphasis the participation of respondents rather than field workers and researcher. Questionnaire is a written list of questions, either given or posted to respondents, who fill it in themselves. Information is gathered directly from people through a series of questions, many of which are likely to offer the respondents some possible replies to tick (Laws: 2003). The response quality depends on the trust the respondents feel for the research, the topic, and the manner in which the questions are worded and arranged. While defining the questionnaire Fred N Kerlinger writes that 'questionnaire is a item used for almost any kind of instrument that has questions or items to which individuals respond. Although the term is used interchangeably with schedule, it seems to be associated more with self administered instruments that have items of the closed or fixed alternative type". According to Goode and Hatt, the word questionnaire refers to a device for securing answers to questions by using a form which respondent fills in him/herself. In the words of Bogardus questionnaire is list of questions sent to a number of persons for them to answer. It secures standardized results that can be tabulated and treated statistically.

Some times the terms questionnaire and schedule are used interchangeably, but various writers differentiate between these two. To differentiate these two P.V.Young writes that the questionnaire is generally sent through the mail to the informants to be answered as specified in a covering letter, but otherwise without further assistance from the sender. The schedule, on the other

hand, is generally filled out by research workers or the enumerators who can interpret the questions when necessary. From above definitions, one can trace the following uniqueness of questionnaire:

- It is an indirect technique of primary data collection
- Mailing process is essential in questionnaire technique
- Questionnaire technique is self-administered
- Respondents must be literate to used this technique
- Larger number of respondents can be included
- Wide area can be covered by questionnaire technique
- It is a quantitative technique rather than qualitative

#### Questionnaire Designing:

Basically there are two types of questionnaires used in social science research. Types of questionnaires are determined by the type of items and questions asked to the respondents i.e. open ended and closed ended questions/items. Closed ended questions have pre-determined categories of responses from which the respondents can choose where as open-ended questions allow respondents to answer in their own words rather than select from pre-determined categories. Closed ended questions force the respondent to select a single response from a list; such lists of responses must cover the entire range of possible answers. Through the help of both open and closed ended questionnaire one can collect different kinds of information. Questions can be formulated to elicit four types of information i.e. (a) knowledge (b) beliefs, attitudes and

#### Kind of Information Obtained Through Question

1. Information related with demographic, socioeconomic, cultural-religious, personal attributes of respondents.
2. Cognitive information
3. Behavioral information
4. Affective information

opinions (c) behaviour and (d) attributes. Any one or a combination of all these types of information can be included in a questionnaire. Data related with demographic, socio-economic, cultural-religious and other personal attributes such as age, gender, caste/ethnicity, education, family size and structure, birth-place, place of growing up, income, occupation, etc can be collected from questionnaire. Cognitive data such as what they know, what they think, what their belief is (in true/false or yes/no firm) on specific issues could be brought together. In addition to this behavioral and affective information such as behaviors, attitudes, preference, like and dislike could be gathered through well-designed questionnaire. Questionnaires are designed according to the objective and hypothesis of the research and questions are composed accordingly. In order to collect valuable information, the researcher should consult all relevant books and published materials before constructing the questions. In terms of structure of questions most of the researchers prefer mixed type of questions (some of the open ended and most of the closed ended) questions. Questionnaires also vary in respect to the numbers and arrangement of questions. Some time we can see closed ended questions with ordered choices and some times with unordered choices and partially close ended (by using "other" options) as well according to the topic and objective of research. Youngman (1986) and Laws (2003) suggest seven types of questions that can be used in a questionnaire.

Types	Key Highlight
Verbal / Open	The expected response is a word, a phrase or an extended comment. Respondents have a chance to give their own views on the issue.
List	A list of items is offered, any of which may be selected. i.e. questions may ask about the type of food preferred and the respondent may prefer several types of food.
Category	The response is only one of a given set of categories. i.e. if daily income categories are provided (1-

	100, 101-200, 2001-300 etc), the respondent can only prefer one category.
<b>Ranking</b>	In ranking questions, the respondent is asked to rank something. i. e. they might be asked to place qualities or characteristics in order of importance to them.
<b>Scale</b>	There are various scaling devices like nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio that may be used in questionnaires carefully.
<b>Quantity</b>	The response is a number (exact or approximate), giving the amount of some characteristics.
<b>Grid</b>	A table or grid is provided to record answers to two or more questions at the same time.

#### Advantage and Disadvantage of questionnaire technique:

Questionnaire as a tool of primary data collection certainly comprises some strength and weakness as well. Some of the major advantages and disadvantages of questionnaire are listed below.

##### (a) Advantages:

- Through the help of post office and drop-and-collect technique a single researcher can gather data from a large and representative sample at a relatively low cost.
- Questionnaires ensure the anonymity of the respondents and provide sufficient time to the respondent to think, fill-up and send it back.
- It is less expensive than other technique of primary data collection. The researcher can save his/her time, resources and efforts by proper handling of questionnaire.
- All the respondents get the same questions with a self-administered questionnaire; therefore there is no possibility of interviewer bias.
- Questionnaire stimulates free thought and is convenient to fill up; it provides a chance for respondents to express feelings and opinions.

- Respondents report socially undesirable behaviour and traits (i.e. arrest records, alcohol dependency, family violence, premarital sexual experience, etc) more willingly in questionnaire than they do in face-to-face interviews.
- More complex questions can be raised in self-administered questionnaire than in personal interview.
- One can put long array of item instead of questions, which is not possible to ask in personal interview.

##### (b) Disadvantages:

- There is no control over how people interpret questions on a self-administered instrument.
- There is possibility of low response rate (it is about 20 - 30%) in developing societies. It is difficult to draw conclusion with low response rate.
- In some cases, you may want respondents to answer a question without knowing what's coming next. This is impossible in a self-administered questionnaire.
- If a questionnaire is returned back, you can't be sure that the respondent who received it is the person who filled it out.
- Some times mailed questionnaires are prone to serious sampling problems. Sampling frames of addresses are almost always imperfect i.e. if you use a phone diary to select sample you may miss all those people who don't have phones or who choose not to list their numbers.
- The use of questionnaire is limited only up to literate respondents viz simply this is not useful for studying non-literate community/society.
- Response is difficult if the response list is too long and sometimes response categories may be superficial or biased.

- The responses of questionnaire are totally dependent on respondent's recall. And there is lack of response to help clarify the ambiguous questions.
- Hand written responses of respondents are difficult to understand.

### Avoiding Bias & Increasing Responses:

It is said that that there is relatively low response rate in this instrument. Therefore researcher should always be careful to increase the response rate of questionnaire. An attractive questionnaire is more likely to be completed and less likely to confuse the respondents. Sending follow-up letter to the non-respondents is the important requirement to increase the response rate. In addition to the follow-up letter the success of a questionnaire depends upon a carefully prepared cover letter as well. Such a cover letter can increase the response rate and result in more honest and complete answer to the survey questions, but badly prepared covering letter may have an adverse effect on the research work. The covering letter of a questionnaire must be credible, personalized, interesting and responsible (Schutt: 2001). Before drafting the cover letter for a questionnaire the researcher should keep in mind that his/her covering letter should be attractive and catchy to the respondents. At least purpose of study and confidentiality of respondents should be assured through covering letter. The usefulness of study and the importance of respondent's cooperation should be added. Directions on how and when to return the questionnaire should be mentioned. At the end of the letter the researcher should include a statement of thanks, a closing and the his/her name. The questions composed in a questionnaire are the basic component that determines the effectiveness of the research/survey. Composing a good question is not an easy task, it may take several times to compose a questions. While composing a questionnaire one should consider what information includes, how to structure the subject matter,

how to arrange questions, and so on. To avoid bias and increase responses the questions must be focused, clear, short and unambiguous. To avoid the bias and ambiguity, every question should focus on a single, specific issues or subject matter. If the questions are not clear it may be interpreted differently, therefore the meaning of the question must be completely clear to all respondents. Short questions are easier to answer and long questions are more likely to lack focus and clarity, therefore questions should be short. Kerlinger (2000: 485-86) has suggested answering the following questions for preparing focused, meaningful, clear, short and unambiguous questionnaire.

- Is the question related to the research problem and the research objective?
- Is the type of question right and appropriate?
- Is the item clear and unambiguous?
- Is the question a leading question?
- Does the question demand information that the respondent does not have?
- Does the question demand personal material that the respondent may resist?
- Is the question loaded with social desirability?

### The Characteristics of a good questionnaire:

All researchers expect that they are preparing a good questionnaire to collect the primary data for their research. But every questionnaire cannot be called a good questionnaire, only few professional and skilled persons can construct good questionnaire. Good questionnaire should be printed on quality paper. It should have appropriate wording, nice looks, meaningful arrangement, polite language, and so on. Some of the characteristics of a good questionnaire are listed below:

1. A good questionnaire should appear professional. It tells the purpose of the study through its title and gives direction on how to complete the questionnaire.

2. It is short and easy to read. As questionnaire increases in length, respondents are less likely to complete them or, if they do, they are less likely to answer the question carefully.
3. It introduces respondents about the purpose of the evaluation, explains why their cooperation is needed, and provides clear direction to complete and return the questionnaire.
4. It is unambiguous and the vocabulary used in a questionnaire should be easily understandable to the respondents.
5. The questions are organized in a logical order. It starts with familiar, easy question. It is followed by items pertinent to the purpose. Questions with similar content or response formats are grouped together. Demographic information is asked near the end of the questionnaires.
6. Branching is clear. If some respondents are not expected to answer all questions, then indicate clearly where branching occurs.
7. It uses boldface or capitalized key words to reduce the chance of misreading instructions.
8. A good questionnaire always provides alternatives, but does not use double-barreled questions.
9. It does not put false premises into questions. Such questions do not take emotional stands in the wording of questions.
10. It asks both closed and open-ended questions. Usually a good questionnaire ends with an open-ended question, "Are there any other comments or concerns you would like to mention?"

11. The title should reflect the content of the instrument. It should be concise and written in language easily understood by the respondents.
12. It comes with a cover letter. The cover letter should explain the purpose of the study and convince the respondent that the study is useful and their participation is important to the success of the study. It should also explain the presence of an identifying number on the questionnaire in a straightforward, honest manner (to facilitate the sending of follow-ups). Further, it should explain who will be answering the questionnaire and how their responses will be kept confidentially. Finally, it should provide directions for the how and when to return the questionnaire.
13. It has an attractive front cover. The front cover has the study title, a graphic illustration, directions to complete questionnaire, and the name and address of the study sponsor.
14. The good questionnaire should end with "thank you".

#### **Practical Aspects of Assembling Questionnaire:**

Some of the researcher has suggested following practical points to compile the questionnaire on the basis of their experiences.

1. **Make it easy to read:** Provide a typed, good quality reproduction and leave lots of blank space.
2. **Keep it short:** Limit it to both sides of one sheet of paper. As a questionnaire becomes longer, respondents are less likely to complete them, if they do, they are less likely to answer the questions carefully.
3. **Introduce the Instrument:** A title is often instructive. Begin with a brief one sentence introduction identifying the audience and purpose and providing a few clear directions to use the instrument.

4. **Organize the contents:** Cluster questions in some logical order (i.e. chronology of event, types of information). Dividing the questionnaire into sections, especially if it is long, helps the respondent keep on track.
5. **Start simply:** Start with relatively simple, direct questions and build up to the more complex, thought-provoking or sensitive questions. Try to put the more personal or potentially threatening questions near by the end of questionnaire.
6. **Be explicit about what is required:** It should be made clear if you want the respondent to choose as many answers as possible. On the other hand, if only one answer is desired, indicate it clearly. Everyone will not read long instructions.
7. **Leave sufficient space:** Make sure respondents have enough space to communicate their views and opinion. Also the lengths of space suggest the respondent how extensive the answer could be.
8. **Clearly indicate branching:** If some respondents are not expected to answer all questions, then indicate clearly where branching occurs and where general questions resume.
9. **Reduce the chance of misreading:** Use boldface or capitalized key words to reduce the chance of misreading.
10. **Give respondents the last word:** Close with an open-ended questions like "Are there any other comments or general concerns you would like to mention?". If you have overlooked an important aspect someone may raise it.

11. **Remember demographic information:** If it is suspected that details of respondent's education, development experience, etc. might help to explain patterns in the result, ask for them near the end of the questionnaire.
12. **Acknowledge respondents' efforts:** Thank them for taking the time to respond and offer the option of getting details of the result after completing the research work.

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