

# BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERVIEWING

# BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Some of this topic will be covered in the next presentation on ethics and security.
- Make sure to prepare for the interview. Use a checklist of topics or questions you wish to ask.
- Make sure that you have the equipment to document the information – a notebook, laptop, or recording device.
- Make sure to do any background research first – read the available press reports and laws that may apply. Read other specialist reports on Myanmar covering the area or topic you are researching.

# SETTING THE SCENE

- Make sure that the interviewee is comfortable with being interviewed and understands the purpose of the interview.
- Their participation is strictly voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time during the process.
- Manage the expectations of participants, to ensure that they understand that your organization is independent from all governments and businesses for example.
- When you are interviewing people individually, the interview should be conducted in private. However some interviewees may want to have a family member or friend with them, which is fine. But community leaders should not be at the interviews, as their views may differ from the interviewee, who should have the opportunity to express these views confidentially.

# WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY ?

- When interviewing people, these are the questions to bear in mind.
- What happened? Try to gather as many details as possible about the incident.
- Who did what to whom?
- Where did it happen? Get specific information – village, township, district, state/region.
- When did it happen? If possible, the precise date: 4 July 2014. If you can get a time of day that is also important. Sometimes it is difficult for people to remember, so it is okay if it is only “at the beginning of the dry season last year” for example.
- How did it happen? What were the general circumstances? Were there witnesses?
- Why is a difficult question to answer, and not always possible. You might want to phrase the question: “Why do you think the authorities confiscated your land?”

# ASKING QUESTIONS

- Remember Who, What, Where, When, How, Why when asking questions of interviewees.
- Ask “open ended questions”. Asking “did you lose your land?” can be answered by “yes” or “no” and does not give you much information.
- Better to ask “How did you lose your land?”
- Avoid asking “loaded questions”. For example, when interviewing a former political prisoner, don’t ask “Were you tortured?”. Don’t suggest to them what the answer should be; ask neutral questions.
- Ask instead: “What were the conditions like in prison? How were you treated? How was your health?”
- Ask follow-up questions if you need more information. Ask for clarification if you don’t understand the answer, for example the sequence of events, which can be hard to follow.