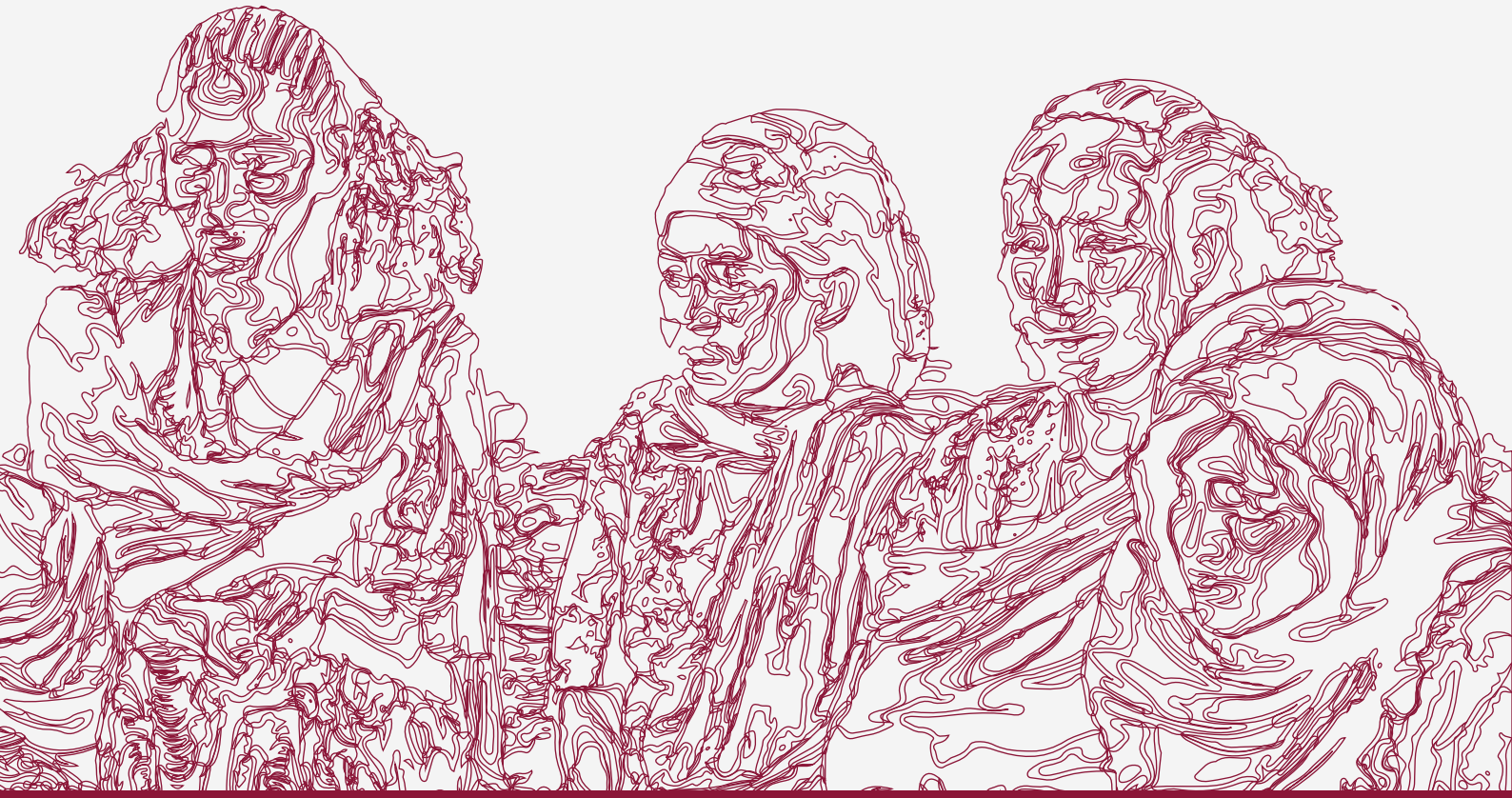
MANUAL FOR INTERVIEWING WOMEN IN URBAN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AND SLUMS



Informed by a research project in Ethiopia and Mozambique

GIRT project team

Editors: **Elisabeth Huber, Tesfaye Zeleke Italemahu, Fitsum Dechasa Kibret, Gudina Abashula Fojo, Tania Berger, Mubarek Kedir Abdulkadir, Kumela Gudeta Nedessa, Atsede Desta Tegegne, Daniel Semunugus Negese, António Manuel de Amurane and Jaibo Rassul Mucufo**

Cover, Illustrations: **Dawit Gebrehiwot**

Publisher: **University of Krems Press**

ISBN e-Book: **978-3-903470-32-3**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.48341/rsay-g144

Product safety according to EU regulation: bibliothek@donau-uni.ac.at

If you would like to quote this work, please use the reference below:

Huber, Elisabeth; Italemahu, Tesfaye Z.; Kibret, Fitsum D.; Fojo, Gudina A.; Berger, Tania; Abdulkadir, Mubarek K.; Nedessa, Kumela G.; Tegegne, Atsede D.; Negese, Daniel S.; De Amurane, António M. and Mucufo, Jaibo R. (2026) Manual for Interviewing Women in Urban Informal Settlements and Slums Informed by a Research Project in Ethiopia and Mozambique. Krems: University of Krems Press. https://doi.org/10.48341/rsay-g144.

Contact: Tania Berger, Department for Building and Environment, University for Continuing Education Krems
https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/en/university/faculties/education-arts-architecture/departments/building-environment.html

tania.berger@donau-uni.ac.at

Produced with the financial support of APPEAR

University of Krems Press

With funding from
Austrian Development Cooperation

appear
Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development

CONTENTS

Abbreviations and Acronyms

FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GIRT	Strengthening Research and Educational Competences of Higher Education Institutions for Gender Sensitive Urban (Informal Settlement) Transformation
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MA	Master of Arts
NAR	Narrative Action Research
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
OpenQDA	Open-Source Qualitative Data Analysis software
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PostDoc	Postdoctoral Researcher
ROSCA	Rotating Savings and Credit Association
WEIRD	Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Corridor development: Government-initiated infrastructure projects in urban areas that aim to modernise transportation, commerce, or housing along key geographic "corridors" (e.g., riparian corridors, road corridors) and that often lead to displacement in informal or unplanned settlements.

Gender-sensitive Urban Transformation: A process of change in planning, development, and service delivery in urban areas that considers and responds to the differing needs, experiences, and challenges of all genders, particularly to reduce inequality and empower marginalised populations, including women living in informal settlements.

Informal settlement: An informal settlement refers to a residential area where housing has been built or occupied without formal planning approval, legal land tenure, or compliance with urban building regulations. These areas often emerge through self-construction by low-income households who cannot access formal housing markets due to high land prices, limited affordable housing supply, and rapid rural-urban migration.

Knowledge Production: The process of producing knowledge through the active engagement of research participants and other stakeholders - using interactive methods such as interviews - rather than merely passively gathering information.

Partial knowledge: The idea that recognises the incompleteness and situational nature of all knowledge. In GIRT, it refers to the localised, context-specific, experience-based understanding that women and other people living in slums and informal settlements hold about their livelihoods, shaped by their lived realities, social positions, and interactions with informal systems.

Precarious housing: Inadequate and unstable living conditions that lack protection from environmental or social risks and are often associated with poor infrastructure, insecure tenure, risk of eviction, and limited access to basic services - which directly affect women's and residents' ability to sustain and enhance their livelihoods in slums and informal settlements.

Slum: A slum is a densely populated urban area characterized by substandard housing, overcrowding, inadequate access to basic services, and poor living conditions. The term is commonly used to describe settlements where residents experience multiple forms of basic deprivation in their living.

Women's voices: The self-expressed narratives, perspectives, lived experiences and knowledge shared by women in informal settlements regarding their roles, challenges and needs, in relation to livelihoods, tenure or housing, and access to basic services.

Triple burden: The combined responsibilities of women who are engaged in paid work, perform unpaid domestic tasks, and manage community or caregiving roles at the family and community levels.

Acknowledgements

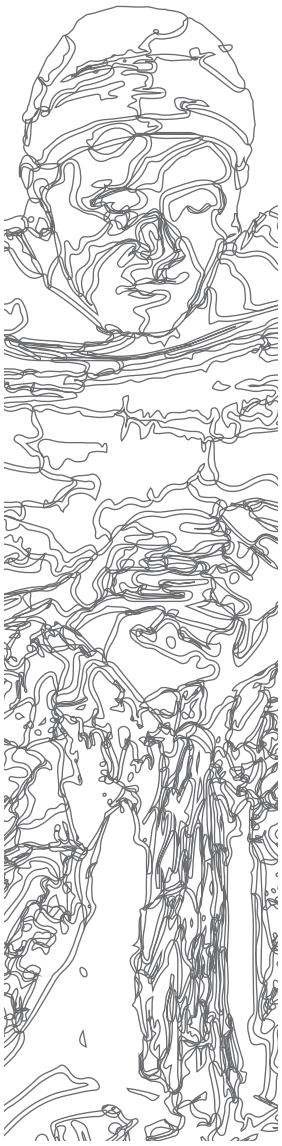
This manual is prepared as part of the GIRT project, funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation under the framework of APPEAR (Austrian Partnership Program in Higher Education and Research for Development).

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of all those who participated in the creation of this manual. Our special thanks go to the GIRT project team members, the women who were willing to be interviewed, and the stakeholders who participated in the qualitative research phase across the partner institutions. These include at Addis Ababa University the Director for Research Administration and the Dean of the College of Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. We thank the Faculty of Architecture and Physical Planning of the Lúrio University for their institutional support. We are grateful to the Office of the Vice President for Research and Community Engagement at Bahir Dar University, along with the Faculty of Social Sciences leadership and administrative personnel, for facilitating the smooth implementation of the project activities.

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the University of Mekelle for its institutional support throughout the implementation of the GIRT project. In particular, we acknowledge the valuable facilitation provided by the Deputy Director for Research and Development of EiT-M, Dr. Goitom, as well as the Scientific Director of EiT-M, Dr. Ashenafi, whose leadership contributed to the effective coordination of project activities. We also express our gratitude to the Finance Department of EiT-M for their administrative and financial support, which was essential for the smooth execution of the project.

We want to thank our research assistants for supporting the GIRT project team and sharing their learnings from interviewing with us. We acknowledge the effort from the Lúrio team to make possible the conduct and analysis of interviews: Dorival Fijamo, Nelsia Dias, Aldevina dos Santos, Virginia Teimoso, Cecilia Boaventura, Meri Camilo, Helena Jorge, Dilchade Abdul Amide, Aziza Amurane, Annaguelda Rosário, Cristina Artur, Conceicao da Graça Cesar and Vania Saguate.

We could not have written this manual without having conducted interviews in the respective study sites. We therefore extend our appreciation to government boards, local authorities and community entities who facilitated access to the study sites and supported engagement with participants, i.e. the Nampula Municipality Authorities, the Namutequeliua Authorities and Secretaries as well as the women Associations. We have been able to benefit from the suggestions of our scientific advisory board members and want to thank them for providing feedback at several stages in the qualitative research phase.



1. How to Use This Manual?

Readers of this manual should not overlook the sections that specify who the manual is for and how different readers can use it. Both subtopics provide guidance for fully understanding the manual's essentials and the context in which it should be used or referred.

1.1. Who the Manual is for?

This manual is designed to guide researchers who are determined to conduct qualitative interviews with women in African countries and other developing countries, especially those living in informal settlements, peri-urban neighbourhoods, and urban slums. It provides practical, ethical, and methodological guidance tailored to low-resource and socially complex environments where women's experiences are often shaped by poverty, informality, gender inequality, limited access to services, and vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks.

The manual supports researchers in planning, implementing, and documenting interviews in culturally sensitive, gender-responsive, and ethically sound manners. It addresses key considerations, including community entry, informed consent in low-literacy settings, safeguarding and confidentiality, power dynamics between researchers and participants, and strategies for building trust. It also offers guidance on adapting interview techniques to diverse contexts, including multilingual environments and subcultural settings.

Attention is given to engaging women whose voices are frequently underrepresented in formal research processes, such as informal workers, female heads of households, young mothers, and women with limited mobility or education. The manual emphasizes respectful listening, trauma-informed approaches, and reflexivity among researchers to ensure that women's lived experiences are accurately and responsibly captured.

It can also serve as a practical training resource for postgraduate students (MA and PhD candidates) who plan to conduct field-based research with women living in low-income and informal settlement settings. By offering clear methodological guidance and context-sensitive interview strategies, it helps emerging researchers build the skills needed to engage respectfully and rigorously with marginalized segments of the population.

In essence, this manual aims to inspire and support high-quality qualitative research by strengthening methodological rigor, enhancing data depth and reliability, and increasing the trustworthiness of research findings. It promotes critical reflection on research ethics, power dynamics, and the responsibilities of researchers working with marginalized communities. Additionally, it provides practical guidance on navigating the complex realities of fieldwork in slums and informal settlements, including ensuring participant safety and responding to unforeseen challenges in resource-limited, socially dynamic urban informal and slum environments.

1.2. How Different Readers Can Use It?

If you are new to qualitative interviewing, it would be best to start with Chapter 8: The 10-Step Guide for Conducting Interviews, which offers a clear, practical approach to conducting this type of research through guided approaches. Although these steps are common across many qualitative interviewing methods, this manual is unique because it specifically focuses on women, a feminine perspective, and women's households living in urban informal and slum environments. The manual also captures the realities of women's lives.

2. Background

Urbanisation across the Global South has accelerated rapidly over the past decades, reshaping social, economic, and spatial dynamics in profound ways. African cities are experiencing significant demographic growth, often outpacing the capacity of formal planning systems to provide adequate housing, infrastructure, and services. As a result, informal settlements and slums have become integral components of urban landscapes. These areas are not temporary anomalies, but enduring socio-spatial formations shaped by migration, economic transformation, land governance systems, and structural inequalities. Within these environments, women navigate complex realities of precarious housing, insecure tenure, limited access to basic services, and constrained livelihood opportunities (OECD et al. 2025).

The background to this manual is rooted in the interdisciplinary research project GIRT: Strengthening Research and Educational Competences of HEIs for Gender sensitive Urban (InfoRmal Settlement) Transformation[1]. Qualitative research was conducted as part of a joint endeavour by three partner universities in Ethiopia and one partner university in Mozambique. One particularity of the GIRT project was that it involved exclusively local academics in empirical research. The project coordinators in Austria were responsible for facilitating exchange and collaborative learning as well as managing the project overall.

The project team consisted of more than 30 researchers from Addis Ababa University, Bahir Dar University and Mekelle University in Ethiopia and Lúrio University in Mozambique. Female researchers comprise approximately one-third of the project team. Disciplinary backgrounds range from Architecture and Urban Planning to Geography, Development Studies, Public Health, Sociology and other Social Sciences. The interdisciplinary composition of the GIRT team by itself shaped the development of the manual. Researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds brought different ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives to the project. Through training workshops, online short courses, pilot studies, and debriefing sessions, team members engaged in critical reflection on positionality, ethics, sampling strategies, and interview techniques. These discussions highlighted the importance of reflexivity, transparency, and collaborative learning in strengthening the quality of qualitative research. The manual thus reflects both theoretical foundations and practical experiences, including challenges encountered in community entry, managing expectations, navigating language differences, and ensuring ethical integrity.

The decision to focus on women was not incidental. Historically, social science research and urban policy have often marginalised or insufficiently represented women's lived experiences, particularly those living in precarious housing situations. Yet women in informal settlements frequently carry a "triple burden": engaging in income-generating activities, performing unpaid domestic labour, and fulfilling caregiving and community responsibilities (Hakim et al. 2025). Their experiences of urban transformation are therefore deeply gendered. Evictions, corridor development projects, service

[1] *https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/girt*

shortages, inflation, or insecurity do not affect all residents equally; rather, they intersect with gender, age, marital status, and socio-economic position.

Prior to this manual and the framing of qualitative interviews, the coordinator offered four short online courses on conducting qualitative social science research during the first and second years of the project. These courses aimed to facilitate the preparation and execution of semi-structured interviews, as well as their post-processing, including data analysis[2]. The short courses were designed for researchers with little or no experience in undertaking qualitative social science research. The short courses covered basic epistemological and methodological concepts as well as reflections on researchers' positionalities. The short courses sparked lively discussions across the team and successfully prompted researchers to reflect on their prior knowledge and convictions. The existence of such differences among the research team members triggered and justified the preparation of a manual for interviewing women in informal and slum settings.

The GIRT team conducted over 400 interviews with women and men in informal settlements and slums in Ethiopia and Mozambique in 2024. To ensure comparability, the team opted for semi-structured interviews. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, translated and coded using the open-source coding software OpenQDA[3]. A subsection of the analysis section is dedicated to this coding software, and much can be gained from it.

Another key concern is knowledge production. Many methodological handbooks in qualitative research are grounded in Western research traditions and contexts frequently described as WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic)[4]. When preparing for fieldwork in informal settlements in Ethiopia and Mozambique, the GIRT team encountered blind spots in mainstream methodological literature. Existing guidelines often provide limited reflection on interviewing women in precarious housing conditions in low-income urban settings, where issues such as tenure insecurity, political sensitivities, limited literacy, and strong community expectations toward researchers are highly relevant. This manual, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap by integrating established qualitative research principles with context-specific lessons learned from field practice in African cities.

The preparation of the manual is also shaped by the socio-political contexts in Ethiopia and Mozambique during which the fieldwork was conducted. Fieldwork in Mekelle and Bahir Dar took place within a broader national environment influenced by the aftermath of the conflict and economic strain. In Mekelle, the consequences of the 2020–2022 conflict were reflected in changes to household composition, including an increase in female-headed households and the presence of internally displaced persons. Although comparatively less intense, Bahir Dar also experienced periods of instability and security concerns during the research phase. Furthermore, Mozambique conducted its local elections in 2023 and general elections in 2024 with moments of high tension specifically during the electoral campaigns and the period soon after the voting days. In Nampula, one of the epicentres of the unrests, damage caused to shops and businesses meant that women in the market area lost their source of income and employment. These contextual conditions inevitably shaped both the lived realities of research participants and the conduct of fieldwork itself. At the same time, it is important to clarify that this manual is not specifically designed as a guide for humanitarian or emergency research, but rather for qualitative research in socially and economically complex urban environments and settings[5].

---

[2] *Slides of the short courses can be found here: https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/en/university/faculties/education-arts architecture/departments/building-environment/research/girt/results.html*

[3] *https://openqda.org/*

[4] *https://weirdpeople.fas.harvard.edu/qa-weird*

This manual is, therefore, based on key learnings from the research project GIRT, complemented by suggestions from the methodological literature and existing guidelines[6]. The blend of established methodological literature with assessments, experiences, and recommendations from the research project in Ethiopia and Mozambique makes this manual valuable for a wide range of researchers and postgraduate students. Overall, the manual is rooted in a dynamic of rapid urbanization, gendered urban inequalities, interdisciplinary academic collaboration, and reflexive methodological practice. It aims to promote more context-sensitive, ethically grounded, and gender-responsive qualitative research in African cities' informal settlements and slums, and beyond.

3. Purpose and Scope of the Manual

The number of handbooks and guidelines for conducting qualitative research is vast. Researchers from various disciplines, including sociology, social and cultural anthropology, psychology, development studies and other social sciences have shared methodological principles, good practices and recommendations with young researchers. Still, to date, many of these publications are based on contexts from research settings in Europe, the United States of America or other highly industrialised countries. Typical research partners in these contexts have been described as WEIRD: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic[7].

When preparing our research project with female research participants in precarious housing situations on the African continent, we therefore encountered multiple blind spots in the mainstream methodological literature and methodological approaches. Regarding female interview partners, Brett and Wheeler (2022) note that: "Historically, social scientific research methods have marginalised, inadequately represented, and even excluded, women's experiences. [...] A feminist approach to interviewing promotes a reflexive and reciprocal approach to the research relationship" (ibid 24). This manual therefore provides suggestions for including women's voices and adapting the research design to their everyday lives. Likewise, handbooks and guidelines often fall short in considering the context of people in precarious housing situations in developing countries, such as those in Africa. The methodological literature usually lacks guidance on how to encourage storytelling or on adequately framing interview questions for participants.

4. Basic Reflections on Ontology and Epistemology

Philosophy, as the mother of all the sciences, is interested in such fundamental issues as the nature of knowledge, reality, and existence. The philosophical journey of knowledge creation is not haphazard but follows a standardised frame of reference. Three critical philosophical foundations of science are closely interrelated and define the directions of scientific inquiry: ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Mirgissa 2024).

[5] *Specific guidelines for humanitarian research can be found here for example: https://www.humanitarianresearch.rescue.org/context*

[6] *To collect experiences from GIRT team members and PhD students involved in conducting interviews for the project, a questionnaire comprising 31 questions was developed. The questionnaire asked about preparations for interviewing, interview settings, particularities of slums and informal settlements, processing interview transcripts and analysing data, and aspects related to research ethics. Interviewers were also invited to formulate recommendations for young researchers adopting similar research methodologies. A total of 17 team members and PhD students participated in the survey. Quotations from survey responses are used throughout this manual to provide first-person perspectives from researchers based in Ethiopia and Mozambique.*

[7] *https://weirdpeople.fas.harvard.edu/qa-weird*

In designing and conducting qualitative research – especially in complex and ever-changing environments like informal settlements – it is crucial to articulate the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin the research approach. Epistemology is a philosophical inquiry into knowledge, dealing with fundamental questions about knowing, with an attention to 'how do we come to know?' and 'how do we know what we know?'. At the same time, ontology focuses on the nature of reality, involving philosophical inquiry into being, existence and reality, with a focus on the question of 'what is real?'

In relation to this project and manual, these philosophical orientations influence how we frame questions, interpret data, and engage with participants of informal settlements in Ethiopia and Mozambique. The example of the elephant being examined by blind men comes to mind. Whether the

Fundamental Questions	Research Paradigms	
	Positivism / post-positivism	Interpretivism (Postmodernism/ Social Constructivism
What is the nature of reality or the phenomenon of interest? (ontology)	Only one reality; reality can be observed, ordered, and explained, and it exists independently.	Multiple realities based on context (time and space) are socially constructed.
How is reality known? What is the nature of knowledge? (epistemology)	Reality is what can be directly observed, objective, and value-free.	Multiple meanings, research as a research instrument, as immersion is critical, and knowledge is value-laden.
How could a phenomenon be studied in the universe? (methodology)	Objective knowledge (facts) can be gained from direct observation or experience, but knowledge is imperfect and fallible.	Observation involves interpretation
Purpose of the Research	Prove or disprove existing conclusions, deductively, following general laws and theories to explain and predict for generalisation.	Explore, describe, understand, explain, change, and evaluate to generate knowledge – new theories, explanations… Findings are specific to time and place.
What is my position as a researcher?	To discover what is real, control subjectivity, and avoid bias.	Interpreter, co-creator of knowledge, researcher tied to knowledge production as facilitator.

Table 1: Ontological and epistemological bases in qualitative research. Source: Adapted from Mirgissa (2024).

men examine the ears, the trunk, the legs or the tail, they will have very different explanations of what an elephant is like. Researchers are also necessarily selective in their choice of research methods. Interviewing, observing, analysing census data, interpreting social media communication, or any other research method will yield very different results. Before choosing a method, researchers should clarify their research interests, define their research questions and outline the expected results of their endeavour. And even when identifying interviewing as the most suitable method for a particular research purpose, issues related to sampling, arranging the interview situation, questioning, etc., remain.

Several researchers approach the topic through a comparative analysis of ontological and epistemological bases in qualitative research, with interviews from a female perspective as a key focus. Table 1 summarises those ontological and epistemological perspectives:

Accordingly, the social constructivist/Interpretivist stance is based on the plurality of the world we live in, where rapid change and diversity compel us to advocate for a new sensitivity to the empirical study of phenomena such as the living conditions of women in slums and informal settlements.

While preparing the qualitative research with women in Ethiopia and Mozambique, we had in-depth discussions about evidence and its relation to researchers' positionalities in the field. We started from two premises:

- Our findings will reflect partial knowledge, and
- Our findings will be socially constructed and co-created with research participants.

We opt for a constructivist ontology, assuming that realities, such as female livelihoods in informal settlements and slums, are constructed in social, cultural, and historical contexts and are therefore multiple and evolving.

We discussed our attitudes and expectations regarding the qualitative research. Interviewing can be understood as a "form of knowledge production" (Gubrium et al. 2012). In this constructivist understanding, as shown in table 1, interpretation is inevitable in order to make sense of a life-world phenomenon experienced by human actors. Researchers are actively involved in meaning-making and should therefore be transparent about their perspectives, assumptions and potential biases. This goes beyond the scientific elaboration of the state of the art of a research subject. It also extends to the researchers' prior experiences, knowledge and expectations.

Robert (2011, cited in Mirgissa 2024) identified five key features of qualitative research that help situate the qualitative research method within the realm of research. These are:

- Studying the meaning of people's lives under real-world conditions.
- Representing the views and perspectives of participants in a study.
- Covering the contextual conditions within which people live.
- Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behaviour, and
- Striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

Building on these discussions, we want to introduce Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of "situated knowledges". This concept claims that the ways of knowing depend on our learning histories, our experiences and the sense-making techniques we have acquired in academia. There is no absolute "truth" out there that we can measure, reproduce or map. In the sense of "situated knowledges", the role of academics is to trace knowledge creation processes. Researchers, therefore, should document all their steps in the research process, reflect on their research pathways and strive to

ensure the credibility of their findings. In taking one's positioning as a researcher and a person seriously, the knowledge created becomes denser and more trustworthy. As human beings, we can't assume a "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986). Instead, we suggest disclosing our assumptions and how they change in the research process, in interactions with research participants and in interpretations of the research materials. We should take time to investigate our own assumptions, become aware of them and consider how they might shape and influence our research practice, and include our reflections when publishing results.

Even with interdisciplinary research, our understanding of phenomena such as housing in informal settlements or slums will not become all-encompassing. Our perceptions and our analyses are not independent from methodological, epistemological and situational factors: "Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see" (Haraway 1988: 587). Following Donna Haraway, we suggest abstaining from simple relativism or easily claimed holism and being frank about one's positioning. This stance also involves recognising the potential and limits of a particular methodological approach. Rather than striving for impossible, perfect knowledge, we embrace well-founded, well-argued knowledge.

The concept of "situated knowledges" aligns well with qualitative research methodologies, given the inherent reflective potential of the research process. The potential of qualitative research lies in strengthening possible hypotheses, understanding the direction of causality, identifying new research instruments, understanding the nature of bias, helping to get a sense of context and identifying the unobservable. Qualitative research within an interdisciplinary team can broaden the horizons and epistemological framings of a phenomenon such as female livelihoods in informal settlements and slums. Collaborative analysis of research materials, presentations to team members, and fruitful discussions can multiply perceptions. In our project GIRT, while 'situated knowledges' enable us to embrace complexity, people may raise concerns about validity and trustworthiness. We addressed this by triangulating our findings across interviews and through validation workshops with different stakeholders and the local community.

4.1. Qualitative Research in Interdisciplinary Teams

Interdisciplinary research is characterised by its focus on a problem, an issue or an intellectual question. Disciplines address this problem, issue or question, but are not themselves the focus of research (Repko and Szostak 2025: 5). Disciplines can be aggregated into a few broad categories, including natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and applied fields. Each discipline usually claims a body of knowledge about specific subjects, has specialised methods and theories and seeks to produce knowledge, concepts and theories within its domain.

Interdisciplinary research requires integrating insights from multiple disciplines to address a complex question or problem. One way to achieve holistic thinking is to address the issue, by seeing it in a larger context and overcoming the controlled and restrictive conditions favoured by disciplinary specialists. A precondition for holistic thinking is perspective taking, that is, the analysis of a problem from the standpoint of a discipline and its epistemology, assumptions, theories, and methods. In comparing the commonalities and differences of disciplinary perspectives, researchers can become aware of their own blind spots and uncertainties. Together with researchers from other disciplinary backgrounds, they combine the best elements of disciplinary insights and develop comprehensive solutions to complex societal problems (Repko and Szostak 2025).

Therefore, this qualitative interviewing manual is enriched by the theoretical lenses, methodological orientations, and philosophical underpinnings of multiple interdisciplinary fields. Drawing from

sociology, it engages with social structures, power relations, and the everyday lived experiences of women in slums and informal settlements. Development studies contribute frameworks for understanding inequality, institutional processes, and pathways of social and economic change for women in precarious housing settings. Anthropology provides interpretive and ethnographic perspectives that foreground culture, meaning-making, and context-based knowledge systems. Insights from gender studies ensure attention to gender relations, intersectionality, and differential access to resources and decision-making among women and their counterparts, men, in the project settings. Urban planning offers tools for analysing spatial dynamics, infrastructure, and the organisation of urban and peri-urban environments in the study contexts of Mekelle, Bahir Dar, Addis Ababa, and Nampula. Food security studies inform the examination of livelihoods, nutrition, access, and vulnerability within household and community contexts of the targeted women.

Finally, local development studies ground the manual in place-based approaches that emphasise participation, context specificity, and community-driven change, as reflected in ongoing discussions with the women's groups. Together, these disciplinary perspectives enable a holistic, reflexive, and context-sensitive approach to qualitative interviewing of women in slums and informal settings of the two African countries.

4.2. Positionalities of Researchers

In qualitative interviewing, researcher positionality has long been a source of ongoing debate because it highlights the role of the researcher's social identity, values, power, and lived experiences in shaping knowledge. Early positivist traditions viewed the researcher as a neutral observer, considering positionality a threat to objectivity. They argued that personal factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, or professional status should be set aside or minimised to reduce bias. Conversely, interpretivist, feminist, and critical paradigms challenged this view by claiming that complete neutrality is neither achievable nor desirable, and that researchers inevitably influence the research process through their own positional standpoints (Harding 1988; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). This shift sparked debate over whether positionality diminishes rigour or, instead, enhances credibility by making power dynamics and assumptions transparent.

A major debate centres on insider-outsider roles in qualitative interviews. Insider researchers may share cultural, linguistic, or experiential backgrounds with participants, which can help build trust, rapport, and deeper understanding. However, critics warn that insider status might lead to taking things for granted, role confusion, and the suppression of dissenting voices. Outsider researchers, while they can offer analytical distance and new perspectives, may encounter challenges like misinterpretation, power imbalances, and limited access to sensitive information. Scholars increasingly highlight that positionality is flexible and context-dependent, with researchers switching roles during interviews based on the situation, subject, and interactions (Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

In this section, we would like to offer some points for reflection for researchers who are interrogating their roles in the field. We do this by referring to the term of 'positionality': "Positionality refers to how the researcher is positioned in relation to the social and political context of the study participants. It refers to dimensions such as our race, age, religion, culture, class, gender, political persuasion and sexual orientation" (Brett and Wheeler 2022: 129). The term positionality also refers to an individual's worldview and the position they adopt about in relation to a research task and its social and political context (Holmes 2020:1). Differently stated: "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and

communication of conclusions" (Malterud 2001: 483 f.).

Becoming aware of one's positionality can help one conduct oneself in a more context-sensitive way in relation to local realities. Before going into more detail on gender, national background, and language choice, we want to give an example of a faith-based matter. Conducting interviews with

religious adherents in Ethiopian and Mozambican settings is often not challenging. However, it is advisable to prepare for interviewing firm believers. This can mean paying more attention, respecting each person's limits and opinions, listening actively, using neutral language so as not to offend sensibilities or beliefs.

As an illustrative case in point, common knowledge about religious practices can be essential, as interview participants might assume that researchers will show consideration for their needs, regardless of the background of the researchers. Being aware of everyday religious rituals can be helpful, so that researchers are prepared to wait for research participants who are carrying out spiritual activities, such as praying, when they arrive at the respective times. More precise suggestions for conducting interviews with Orthodox religious believers include not eating meat or milk products in front of them during fasting periods. Two more recommendations on interviewing firm believers from the GIRT team can be found here:

Contemporary qualitative methodology generally considers positionality not as a flaw to be eliminated but as an analytical resource that requires ongoing reflexive engagement. The debate has thus shifted from whether positionality matters to how it should be critically examined, transparently articulated, and ethically managed throughout research design, data collection, and interpretation. Explicit positionality statements and reflexive practices are now widely encouraged as markers of rigour and trustworthiness, although discussions continue regarding standardisation, depth, and the risk of performative reflexivity (Berger 2015).

4.2.1. Gendered Positionalities in Fieldwork

The positionality of researchers is closely entangled with their embodied knowledge, including

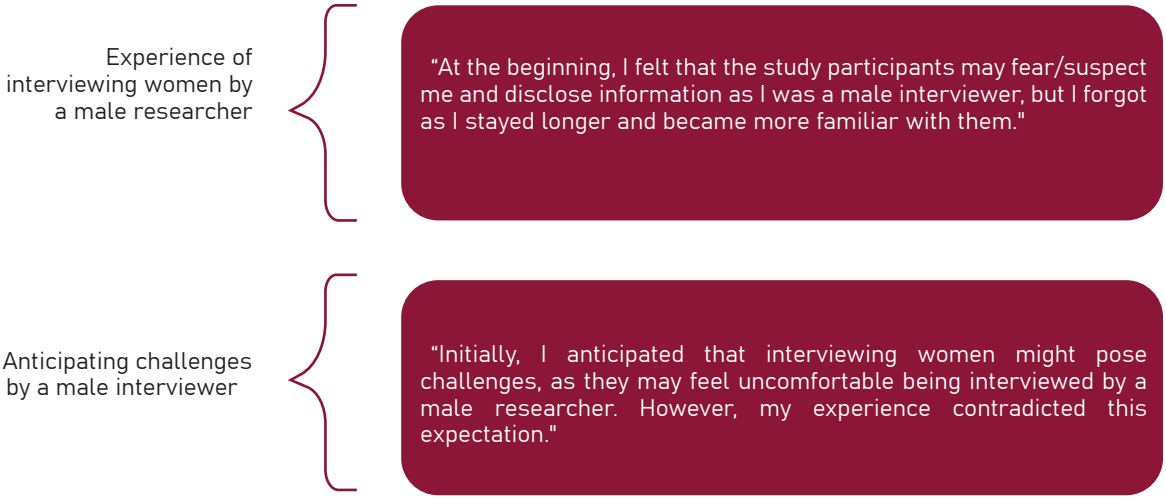
physical, cognitive, emotional and relational components. Researchers might reflect on how they dress and behave, and how research participants will probably perceive them. Body language, gestures, facial expressions, or eye contact can convey signals to the interview partners and thereby influence the course of the interview. As a female or male researcher, maintaining an appropriate distance while approaching close enough to engage in meaningful conversation can vary depending on the cultural context and interview situation.

Space for Trust	Connectivity	Rapport
"Being a woman opens a space of trust. Women feel more comfortable and speak openly, allowing for a calm, deep dialogue. There is greater security, especially in sensitive issues related to religion or security of possession."	"I tried to connect with them by showing that, as women, we share different struggles. I made sure they felt truly heard, respected, and safe to share without fear or shame."	"To establish rapport with female interview partners, I created a safe environment, emphasized shared experiences as women, and ensured confidentiality. It's important to show empathy, listen actively, and respect cultural norms and personal boundaries."

The following reflections from the GIRT project team are based on debriefing sessions, online workshops, and the researchers' field notes. While these are not generalizable truths, they showcase specific insights that reflect the emotional, practical, and ethical encounters researchers experienced in the field, while also evidencing the diversity of these encounters.

An advantage of female researchers is that they often share experiences like those narrated by the interview partners. But even female researchers should not underestimate the diversity of female lived experiences. Being a divorced female head of household caring for four children, for example, might create additional obstacles in contextualising the interview participant's statements. As a researcher, you may miss subtleties, examples or details necessary to understand the first-person perspective. Please find here some experiences shared from female team members in the project GIRT on interviewing women:

Creating trust with female residents in informal settlements and urban slums seemed not to be a major challenge for female researchers in the project GIRT: "I just approached them sisterly and informed them that the interview is confidential and anonymous".



Even if, content-wise, male and female interviewers may achieve very similar results, the affective component of the interviews can be quite different. The differences are thus the diverging "situated affective encounters", meaning varying degrees of intensity, resonance or dissonance (Ayata et al. 2019). Female researchers exposing themselves to the interview partners can usually create more trust and mutual understanding: "As a woman, I do share their emotions and feel their feelings and encourage them to cope with their bad emotions. I often give them time to release their emotions".

For male researchers, "it is advisable to refrain from shaking hands or body contact such as cheeks or heads". In the case of the GIRT project, male researchers considered their interview experiences successful. Thorough preparation for the interviews, familiarity with the study site, and respectful communication with female interview partners proved successful. Please find here some reflections shared by male team members in the project GIRT on interviewing women:

4.2.2. Local and Foreign Researchers

Being a researcher living in the same locality or region can have both advantages and disadvantages in the interviewing process. Interview participants will consider them insiders who share similar experiences and understand local living situations and residents' expectations. Coming from abroad,

"The invited women anticipated receiving some assistance. Therefore, elderly women and the very weak came to the hall."

"Some expected that some incentive or support would be provided. And some expected this to forward their concerns/frustrations/demands to the authorities."

"Most of the study participants expected that there would be intervention projects/programs that would improve their socioeconomic conditions."

researchers may have more freedom to ask questions about apparently obvious phenomena, but sometimes without deeper contextual insights. Having the advantage of being fresh and naïve comes with the challenge of building trusting relationships with interview partners. Differences in initial conditions for local and foreign researchers are well summarised by Brett and Wheeler (2022): "We tend to gravitate towards people who share similar views, and it may feel more comfortable to interview people you are familiar with. But one difficulty with this is that you may become 'research-blind' to nuances of meaning. You may miss following up on points because they seem too obvious. Furthermore, your participants may omit things that they assume you already know or censor topics that they believe might damage the relationship with you" (ibid. 130).

Expectations of residents in urban slums and informal settlements in the project GIRT towards the locally based researchers were often directed to assistance and support services:

Whether they are local or from abroad, interview partners might mistake the researchers for government officials, NGO workers or representatives of other international organisations. Presenting yourself as a researcher, academic, student, or author is essential to avoid any misunderstandings: "I communicated to them that I am not a government official or affiliated with any government office, rather a researcher from the university". Nevertheless, researchers should be prepared that previous research projects, assessments or interventions can impact a research endeavour: "Some participants shared that many researchers had interviewed them before, but they hadn't seen any solutions or changes. They expressed hope that this research would bring something meaningful and essential to the community".

However, the categories of "insider" and "outsider" are not absolute. A local investigator may still be viewed as an 'outsider' based on class, ethnicity, religion, language, or the institution to which they are affiliated. At the same time, foreigners may develop trust with the group through their extended stay in the field or by claiming political neutrality. Instead of framing relationships simply as membership categories, it is helpful to reflect on the relationship of "partial insider" or "situated outsider".

Especially in Ethiopia, where demolishing informal settlements and evicting residents occurs regularly, local researchers can be suspected of coming from government offices. Being unclear or not proactive in explaining the purpose of the interviews can cause unnecessary trouble for a researcher. One of the team members in the project GIRT got arrested when visiting the study site in an informal settlement in Ethiopia and was then interrogated by local community police.

In contexts such as the one described above, building trust and reducing unfounded fears becomes crucial for succeeding with a research endeavour: "The first time I was afraid that due to the current unrest and tension in Ethiopia, respondents may relate governance issues to politics, and they may be reluctant to give the real information about governance issues in their neighbourhoods". Explaining that the study has no political interests and is not linked to any political party cannot be over-emphasised in the communication with female research participants: "I reassured them that the information was for research purposes only and not linked to authorities. Having experienced the war and siege ourselves, we understood their insecurities. Our goal was to listen, find solutions and hopefully improve their situation"[8].

[8] *At the time of conducting research in Mekelle and Bahir Dar, residents of these Ethiopian cities were affected by war and armed conflict. The political situation in Ethiopia had worsened the economic conditions, manifest in high inflation, widespread unemployment and food insecurity. Post-conflict access to credits and aid packages had temporarily stopped, with significant impacts on local livelihoods. The urban administration in Mekelle experienced internal cleavages due to post-conflict political tensions. Although less severe, the situation in Bahir Dar was described as volatile due to prolonged curfews and insecurity during the project period. The aftermath of armed conflict and clashes between government forces and militia became manifest in Mekelle and Bahir Dar through the presence of widows, divorced women or otherwise destitute women begging in the vicinity of churches.*

4.2.3. Native and Official Languages

The choice of language, or languages, used in qualitative interviews has wide-reaching effects on methodology, epistemology, and quality control because language is not a neutral tool but a carrier of meaning, power, and cultural context. Methodologically, the language used in the interview influences the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, the process of data collection, and the depth of narratives obtained. Conducting interviews in participants' first or preferred language often helps build rapport, trust, and richer descriptions, whereas using a second or dominant language might limit expression, cause simplifications, or silence culturally embedded concepts that do not have direct equivalents. Decisions around translation, interpretation, and transcription also impact methodological rigour, since each stage involves interpretive choices that can alter the data and affect analytic results (Temple and Young 2004; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Creswell and Poth 2024).

Epistemologically, language shapes what can be known and how knowledge is created and represented in qualitative research. Meaning is built through language, and different languages carry unique worldviews, values, and social realities. When interviews are conducted in a language that does not fully reflect participants' lived experiences, certain forms of knowledge may be marginalised or distorted, thereby reinforcing power imbalances between researchers and participants. On the other hand, using local or indigenous languages can promote epistemic justice by enabling participants to express their realities in their own terms, while also challenging dominant knowledge frameworks embedded in global or academic languages (Bourdieu 1991; Tisdell et al. 2025; Chilisa 2020).

From a quality assurance perspective, language choice directly affects the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative interviewing and findings. Misinterpretation, loss of nuance, or researcher bias can occur during translation and analysis if linguistic and cultural competencies are insufficient. Transparent documentation of language decisions, the use of trained bilingual researchers or translators, back-translation, and reflexive engagement with linguistic positionality are, therefore, essential strategies to enhance trustworthiness. Reflexivity regarding how language mediates meaning further strengthens the rigour and ethical integrity of qualitative inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Temple and Young 2004; Braun and Clarke 2021).

In the GIRT project, we decided to conduct interviews in Ethiopia in the local lingua franca, Amharic and Tigrinya. In the case of Mozambique, Portuguese was mostly used as the interview language, but knowledge of the Emakhuwa language proved essential to clarify miscomprehensions and to rephrase questions differently when needed. Even on a more local level, differences in language usage can exist. Whether these are dialects, local vernaculars or sociolects used by a socioeconomic class or professional group, the researchers should become acquainted with these particularities. Through the wording, researchers signal their level of expertise.

Assuring mutual understanding might require using simple, everyday language, adapting the interview style to local communication patterns, and avoiding academic jargon: "I used simple and local language, explaining the questions in a familiar context rather than professional terms, so participants felt comfortable and could express their ideas as if talking to a friend".

Explanatory and illustrative terminologies to clarify concepts of structures and modalities might be needed. Particularly when treating phenomena on a higher order involving political, legal, or bureaucratic knowledge, difficulties in translating words can occur: "Some questions were

incomprehensible to the women. You need to take the time to explain to them such terms as good governance, claims, social networks, well-being, etc. […] The problem is not one of semantics but also practice. In a society where the government (governor) and the society (governed) are taken as the only actors involved in good governance, it is difficult to let them understand the role of civil society groups and community-based organisations, media, and academia in the government process".

In exceptional cases, not only simplifying and repeating questions, interpreting the questions in the local contexts, and giving examples might be necessary, but also interventions by persons close to the interview participants to assure understanding: "Some elderly women have weak hearing capacity. There were language barriers in a few cases. Making them understand the questions might require the assistance of others".

5. Methodology of Qualitative Research

5.1. Methodology of Interviewing

Interviewing is one of the most common qualitative research methods. Usually considered as a method suitable for beginners and newcomers in social sciences, interviewing is not a trivial technique. "Conducting an interview is an underestimated task, which goes beyond simply hearing what your participant says. Active listening is a real skill that requires intense concentration, not just the words that are spoken but also their tone and implied meaning" (Brett and Wheeler 2022: 122). Masters of interviewing gain insights into life histories, motivations and original first-person narratives. Prominent examples of studies based on interviewing include Studs Terkel's Book "Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do" (1974) or the book by Pierre Bourdieu et al. (2000) "The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society".

Interviewing is often chosen as a method because it allows for personal accounts of lived experience. Not merely representing facts and events, interview statements are shaped by subjective perceptions and social and cultural circumstances. Interviewing is not only a method for gathering information; the encounter between the interviewer and interviewee also creates a variety of interactional dynamics. Even though interviewing is generally characterised by an asymmetric style of communication, the situation and the outcomes of an interview can be considered co-created by the people involved.

There are multiple interview methods, forms and functions. Interviewing methodology has evolved and differentiated over the past decades and is now adapted to many different settings. Types of interviews include semi-structured, narrative, and discursive interviews, among others. For further insights into the history and traditions of interviewing, we recommend consulting the books "How to do qualitative interviewing" by Brett and Wheeler (2022), "Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data" by Rubin and Rubin (2012), as well as "InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing" by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015).

This manual focuses on semi-structured interviews. This interview style implies openness for investigating emerging themes in the research process.

A semi-structured interview guide is a tool to collect data in qualitative research. It is a flexible framework of open-ended questions designed to guide an interview while allowing room for in-depth exploration of participants' views, experiences, feelings, and meanings. It is a list of key topics, themes or questions that a researcher uses during an interview to ensure that all relevant areas are

covered without restricting the conversation to a fixed order or wording. As its name indicates, it combines structure to maintain focus and flexibility to allow new ideas to emerge. The primary purpose of using a semi-structured interview guide is to collect in-depth/rich qualitative data on participants' lived experiences, attitudes, beliefs and motivations regarding the topic under investigation. It ensures consistency across interviews while permitting individual variations in responses. Moreover, a semi-structured interview guide allows the researcher to explore unanticipated themes that often arise in conversation.

The following are key features of semi-structured interview guides.

- Guided but flexible: The interviewer follows a set of questions prepared based on available literature and other information, but the interviewer can change the order, rephrase questions, probe deeper or ask new questions based on emerging issues.
- Open-ended questions: A semi-structured question encourages detailed, descriptive or explanatory answers rather than "Yes/No" responses.
- Study participant-centred: A semi-structured interview guide allows study participants to share their own perspectives and experiences regarding a given phenomenon in their own words.
- Exploratory in nature: A semi-structured interview guide is often used to explore complex social, emotional or cultural issues that are not yet well studied or exhaustively studied.

Interviewers "have the freedom to rephrase a question, skip a question, formulate new questions, follow up on emerging leads, and probe for more detail from a respondent" (Brett and Wheeler 2022: 23). In the project GIRT, the experience of one researcher familiar with surveys but not with interviews in qualitative research, illustrates the principle of flexible handling of the interview guide: "In the first interview, the respondent was a bit confused by the repetition of questions in different sections. Before proceeding, I worked on rephrasing and regrouping the questions to keep the flow of conversation natural". Interviewers should avoid redundant questions to prevent annoying interview partners. In the following sections of this manual, we will engage with strategies, techniques and tactics of interviewing women in informal settlements and slums.

We want to stress that interviewing might not always be the most suitable method for exploring a research question. Before researchers begin preparing for an interview study, they should ask themselves: Has the best method been chosen for the research question?

Walking interviews, informal conversations, and paper/smartphone forms are chosen for their contextual appropriateness and safety, maximising the collection of authentic narratives about lived experiences within the system.

5.1.1. In-Depth Interview

In-depth interviews is among the commonly used qualitative research methods. It is a one-to-one conversation in which the researcher explores people's perspectives on a particular idea, experience, perception, feeling or meaning in detail. It is an open-ended, flexible method that allows the discussion to flow naturally rather than being strictly structured. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand participants' lived experiences, subjective meanings, and complex social, cultural or emotional issues, thereby generating deep insights into behaviours, motivations and decision-making.

5.1.2. Key-Informant Interview

Key informant interview is another qualitative research method used to collect in-depth information from individuals who have specialised knowledge (expertise), experience, or influence on a particular topic, community or issue. The method aims to gain expert perspectives on specific issues such as community dynamics, problems, and needs, and to explore policies, programs or social phenomena in depth. Like other qualitative methods, data from key informant interviews make a significant contribution by complementing other data sources.

5.2. Sampling Strategies for Interviewing

The sampling strategy for conducting qualitative interviews is an integral component of the research design because it affects the usefulness of the collected data, the types of analysis possible, and the opportunities for transferring the findings to other contexts or settings (Ritchie et al. 2014). Sampling strategies can be differentiated into probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling, characterized by random selection and known probabilities of selection, is predominant in quantitative studies because the aim is to produce a statistically representative sample. The information generated by the sample is used to estimate the prevalence of characteristics in the broader population. In qualitative research, participants are typically selected based on socio-demographic profiles or other socially significant features. Non-probability sampling encompasses purposive, theoretical, and convenience sampling.

- **Purposive sampling:** Members of a sample are chosen to cover key criteria. Age is often used as a criterion to include persons across different age groups in a sample. The aim of purposive sampling can be to select homogenous, heterogenous or typical cases.
- Theoretical sampling: Sampling occurs to develop and test theoretical constructs. The research process is iterative, involving selecting research participants, analysing the data and then selecting further research participants to find new specific characteristics. This process ends at "data saturation" when no new insights are found.
- **Convenience sampling:** Research participants are recruited according to availability. Only those persons who are already known to the researchers or can be easily accessed are included in the research process. This sampling strategy has drawbacks, including the generation of biased samples and reduced validity of findings. Snowball sampling is a subtype of convenience sampling, in which research participants suggest additional participants from among their acquaintances.

The sampling technique employed in the GIRT project was a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was used to identify slum areas or informal settlements, with support from the kebele[9] administration offices. Convenience sampling was used to select households at the study sites. In Bahir Dar, for example, a list of households from the identified informal settlement served as the basis for convenience sampling. In the case of Nampula, and Mozambique in general, bairros (neighbourhoods) are comprised by the unidade comunal (residential unit) and this is split into quarteirões (blocks), which are the unit of ten houses

[9]*The lowest/smallest administrative unit/division in Ethiopia.*

represented by an authority that reports to the neighbourhood secretary. In Nampula, the interviews were conducted with female residents in three unidades comunais of Namutequeliua. Sampling followed the principles of purposive and convenience sampling. First, the researchers in Nampula contacted the community leaders and the secretaries for support in recruiting interview partners. At the same time, some research assistants who had lived in Namutequeliua helped contacting women at the study site. Finally, some interviewed women indicated other women matching the profile who were then approached for an interview.

5.3. Research Design

Research designs are important frameworks based on qualitative research epistemology that guide the methodology and methods used to generate data, including who will provide the data and what expectations will guide data collection. A research design provides a strategy and plan for conducting the study to answer the research questions (Mirgissa 2024). Accordingly, the following key designs are highlighted, with the assumption that readers can keep an eye on emerging designs and/or contribute by introducing new designs that may enrich qualitative research.

5.3.1. Phenomenological Approach

A phenomenological research design is particularly suited to the study of slums and informal settlements, where lived experiences are shaped by informality and everyday negotiations with structural exclusion. In the context of women's living conditions in precarious housing situations in Ethiopia and Mozambique, a phenomenological approach enables an in-depth exploration of how women experience, interpret, and give meaning to life in slums and informal settlements characterized by inadequate housing, limited access to basic services, tenure insecurity, and exposure to social and environmental risks (UN-Habitat 2020; Turok and Borel-Saladin 2016). By deliberately bracketing researchers' preconceived assumptions, phenomenology prioritises women's own voices and perspectives, allowing their lived realities of informality, vulnerability, resilience, and coping strategies to emerge authentically (Creswell and Poth 2018; Moustakas 1994).

Within slum and informal settlement contexts, phenomenological design helps to understand, describe, and interpret how women experience everyday life, focusing on both what is experienced, such as overcrowding, sanitation challenges, insecurity, and livelihood precarity, and how these experiences are perceived and emotionally processed by those who live them (Van Manen 2016; De Amurane et al. 2023). This approach is especially valuable in urban poverty research, as it moves beyond structural descriptions of deprivation to capture the subjective meanings women attach to housing insecurity, social networks, gendered responsibilities, and survival strategies in informal settlements (Meth 2017). By uncovering these nuanced and often overlooked dimensions, phenomenological research provides unique insights into women's lived realities and reveals evidence from unexpected angles that can inform more context-responsive urban, housing, and social policies in slum and informal settlement settings (UN-Habitat 2020).

Phenomenological research design particularly benefits from the use of multiple methods and repeated visits when applied to slums and informal settlements, where lived experiences are deeply embedded in complex social, spatial, and temporal contexts. Given the study's focus on drawing meaning from women's lived experiences in informal and precarious housing environments, the research team conducted multiple visits to participants residing in slums and informal settlements. Such settings are dynamic and fluid, shaped by everyday negotiations over space, services, livelihoods, and safety; therefore, a single encounter is often insufficient to fully capture the depth and variability of participants' experiences (Creswell and Poth 2018; Van Manen 2016).

Although it is difficult to predetermine the exact number of visits required, phenomenological rigour in slum and informal settlement research necessitates continued engagement with participants until contextual, temporal, and spatial meanings are saturated. Repeated visits allow researchers to better understand how women's experiences of housing insecurity, informality, and vulnerability evolve over time and across different spaces within the settlement (Moustakas 1994; Meth 2017). Returning to the same participants also strengthens trust and rapport, an essential consideration in marginalised urban contexts where residents may initially be cautious of external researchers due to histories of exclusion or eviction threats (UN-Habitat 2020).

During these repeated visits, the research team complemented in-depth interviews with systematic observations of participants' living environments and daily practices within the informal settlement. Observational methods enabled the documentation of embodied experiences, spatial arrangements, and everyday interactions that participants may not explicitly articulate during interviews, such as coping strategies related to overcrowding, water access, sanitation, or safety (Creswell and Poth 2018). The integration of interviews and observations thus enriched the phenomenological analysis, allowing for a more holistic and grounded understanding of women's lived experiences in slums and informal settlements, and revealing meanings that might otherwise remain hidden or taken for granted (Van Manen 2016).

5.3.2. Case Study Approach

Case study research design balances qualitative and quantitative methods and is especially useful for studying complex, context-specific environments like slums and informal settlements. In qualitative research, a case study aims to develop a detailed, contextually based, and multifaceted understanding of a phenomenon as it occurs in real-life settings, where social, spatial, economic, and institutional factors come together (Yin 2018; Stake 1995). For slums and informal settlements, this approach enables researchers to explore the lived experiences of residents within specific neighbourhoods, communities, or housing setups, recognising the uniqueness and connectedness of each environment.

Case study design involves a detailed examination of the characteristics, meanings, and implications of individuals, households, groups, families, places or geographical settings, events, institutions, or programs situated within informal settlements. This approach enables researchers to explain, describe, or explore everyday practices and experiences related to housing informality, access to services, tenure insecurity, livelihood strategies, and governance arrangements in their natural contexts (Flyvbjerg 2011; UN-Habitat 2020). By focusing on bounded cases such as a particular slum, upgrading initiative, or community-based intervention, the case study approach provides a holistic understanding that would be difficult to achieve through large-scale surveys alone.

Findings from case studies in slums and informal settlements are especially valuable for revealing causal links and pathways related to policy initiatives, service delivery models, or urban upgrading programs. Instead of allocating extensive resources to statistically determine causal relationships between variables, case study research is particularly effective for answering "how," "what," and "why" questions, providing insight into processes, mechanisms, and contextual factors that influence outcomes in informal urban settings (Yin 2018; Flyvbjerg 2011). Therefore, case study design provides strong, practical evidence to guide more responsive, context-aware urban policies and interventions in slums and informal settlements.

Case study research design can serve different but complementary purposes, particularly in research on slums and informal settlements, where social, spatial, and institutional realities are deeply intertwined. An explanatory case study seeks to clarify causal links between urban

challenges such as inadequate housing, tenure insecurity, or limited access to basic services and their underlying drivers, including policy gaps, governance arrangements, and socioeconomic inequalities (Yin 2018). This approach helps reveal how and why specific problems persist within informal settlement contexts.

An exploratory case study is suitable when the phenomenon of interest is not yet well understood, as is often the case in rapidly changing slums and informal settlements. Exploratory case studies allow researchers to examine emerging issues, community dynamics, or coping strategies without set hypotheses, letting new patterns and insights emerge from the field (Stake 1995; Burawoy 1998; Flyvbjerg 2011). Conversely, a descriptive case study aims to provide a detailed and rich account of the phenomenon and its context, such as the physical layout of an informal settlement, residents' daily routines, or interactions with local institutions (Yin 2018).

Despite these different approaches, the main goal of case study research is to focus on the case itself and highlight its complexity in a comprehensive and meaningful way. By examining a bounded case, whether it's a specific informal settlement, community initiative, or policy intervention, case study design captures the interaction between context and phenomenon, providing detailed explanations of "how," "why," and "under what conditions" outcomes develop in slums and informal settlements (Flyvbjerg 2011).

Often, confusion exists about the differences between phenomenology and case study. The main difference, however, is that a case study involves an in-depth, detailed investigation of a single event, situation, or individual over time, while phenomenology aims to understand the subjective, lived experiences and perspectives of participants within a specific timeframe.

5.3.3. Narrative Action Research Approach

Narrative research is particularly valuable in studies of slums and informal settlements, as it enables participants to explain their lived experiences in their own words and narrative forms, an opportunity often constrained in other qualitative designs. In contexts characterised by informality, marginalisation, and uneven power relations, narrative design provides space for residents to articulate how they experience housing insecurity, poverty, displacement, social networks, and everyday survival strategies over time (Riessman 2008; UN-Habitat 2020). By privileging participants' voices, narrative research captures the depth and continuity of life in informal settlements as lived and remembered by those who inhabit them.

Narrative Action Research (NAR) is a transformative, participatory, and interpretive research approach that combines narrative inquiry with principles from Participatory Action Research (PAR) and transformative transdisciplinary research. It is grounded in the assumption that individuals understand, interpret, and navigate their worlds through lived stories, and that these micro-narratives provide a uniquely situated window into everyday experience, decision-making, and social relations. In contexts such as informal settlements in Ethiopia and Mozambique—where women's lived realities, social power dynamics, and everyday negotiations are rarely captured through conventional methods—NAR offers a particularly suitable epistemological and methodological pathway.

At the heart of NAR are the principles of epistemic justice, co-designing of the research process, self-signification, as well as distributed cognition and distributed ethnography (Van Breda 2025). The method directly addresses the double hermeneutic—the fact that social researchers interpret how participants already interpret their own life-worlds—by shifting interpretive authority back to participants. The approach builds on sense-making theory, which applies the logic of

"self-signification", in which participants interpret the meaning of their own stories rather than having meaning imposed by researchers. Rather than treating stories merely as data to be analysed externally, NAR enables participants to articulate what their narratives mean, what emotions or relationships they reflect, and how they connect to broader social conditions. This emphasis on distributed cognition and participant-led meaning-making disrupts hierarchical research relations and creates a more equitable, co-productive process well aligned with feminist and decolonial research frameworks used in GIRT.

NAR can be understood as an iterative process but can also be depicted as a multi-phased linear process (Van Breda 2025). NAR includes the following steps:

- Preparation (context description, stakeholder analysis, developing research questions)
- Design (co-designing the signification framework)
- Narrative/Data Collection
- Analysis and Sense Making
- Returning Stories
- Implementation

Data collection within NAR centres on the gathering of micro-narratives: short, specific stories capturing concrete experiences, often focusing on a single moment or event. These stories may be elicited through naïve interviewing, walk-along conversations, anecdote circles, or informal interactions embedded in community settings. A single prompting question typically guides narrative generation, encouraging participants to speak in their own words, with minimal researcher intervention. This format allows for a high volume of diverse narratives, which is essential for identifying recurring patterns and differences in women's experiences regarding housing, safety, infrastructure, livelihoods, or gender issues. The emphasis on quantity and diversity distinguishes NAR from traditional qualitative interviewing and allows for pattern-level insights that are still grounded in contextually rich accounts.

A distinctive component of NAR is the signification framework (Van Breda 2025), which enables participants to analyse their own narratives using a structured set of interpretive tools. The signification framework typically includes triads, dyads, "stones," and multiple-choice or demographic questions. Triads ask participants to position their story within a triangular field representing three related concepts (such as agency, vulnerability, or relational dynamics), while dyads present a spectrum between two poles (such as tradition versus change or constraint versus opportunity). Stones offer a spatial grid for placing concepts related to the narrative, and multiple-choice questions provide categorical information about actors, themes, emotions, or settings. These signifiers are not arbitrary; they are co-designed with community co-researchers and grounded in anthropological understandings of behaviour, power, gender, and social interaction. Their purpose is to reveal layers of meaning that are not always explicit in the verbal story itself—values, tensions, beliefs, aspirations, and interpretations embedded in everyday experience.

The analytical process in NAR is iterative and collaborative. Signified narratives produce quantitative and qualitative patterns that can be visualised through heat maps, landscapes, cluster diagrams, or distribution plots. These visualisations allow both researchers and participants to observe emergent trends across many stories, such as shared experiences of insecurity, divergent perceptions of institutions, or the clustering of emotions around specific issues. Importantly, analysis does not end with the production of visual outputs. John van Breda et al. (2018; 2014) emphasise the process of "returning" narratives to participants—in small group discussions, community feedback sessions, or validation workshops—where visual patterns and individual stories are collectively interpreted. This

collaborative sense-making process is where narrative patterns are contextualised, contested, and deepened. It is also where joint problem framing occurs: participants articulate what the patterns mean for their community, what issues are most critical, and where possibilities for change exist.

Through this participatory analytical stage, NAR supports the co-production of systems knowledge (what is happening), target knowledge (what ought to be different), and transformation knowledge (how change might be achieved). For the GIRT project, this aligns with moving beyond descriptive accounts of women's experiences toward actionable insights that can inform gender-sensitive planning, service provision, or community-based interventions. Insights generated through collaborative sense-making can form the basis for small-scale "safe-to-fail" experiments, consistent with transformative transdisciplinary research principles, where potential solutions or improvements are tested in partnership with community members.

Overall, NAR provides a rigorous yet flexible methodology for engaging with women's lived realities in informal settlements. Its focus on narrative depth, self-signification, collaborative interpretation, and iterative cycles of reflection and action makes it well-suited for complex, sensitive, and deeply contextual research. By positioning women not merely as sources of data but as interpreters, analysts, and contributors to knowledge production, NAR strengthens both the validity of the research and its potential to support meaningful social transformation within the study sites.

5.4. Axiology

Axiology, the study of values and ethics, is essential in qualitative research because it influences how knowledge is created, interpreted, and presented. In studies carried out in the slums and informal settlements of Ethiopia and Mozambique, axiology is especially significant due to the contexts marked by poverty, informality, power inequalities, and the marginalisation of residents' voices. Below are the main aspects of axiology and how they relate to research in these environments.

One core aspect of axiology is its focus on ethical responsibility and moral judgment. Axiology emphasises ethical principles such as respect, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence throughout the research process (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). In research within informal settlements, this includes protecting female participants from harm, ensuring informed consent in contexts of low literacy, safeguarding confidentiality when tenure insecurity or political sensitivities are present, and avoiding extractive research practices that exploit vulnerable populations (UN-Habitat 2020).

Another key aspect is valuing female participants' voices and lived experiences. Axiological inquiry emphasises what research participants find meaningful, significant, and worth focusing on (Heron and Reason 1997). In slums and informal settlements of Ethiopia and Mozambique, this involves centring female residents' own definitions of wellbeing, dignity, security, and development rather than imposing externally defined indicators of urban success or poverty reduction.

Overall, axiology enhances research in slums and informal settlements by integrating ethical awareness, value transparency, and respect for human dignity throughout all stages of inquiry. By explicitly addressing values, researchers studying informal urban areas in Ethiopia and Mozambique can generate knowledge that is not only methodologically solid but also socially responsible and transformative (Creswell and Poth 2018; Denzin and Lincoln 2018; Letherby 2003).

5.4.1. Research Ethics

Ethics is about safeguarding the integrity of all participants. This includes careful planning, creating a safe interview environment, and addressing the challenges of handling sensitive information responsibly. We do not adopt a cookbook approach to research ethics, as there are no ready-made solutions for ethical questions. We can offer some points for reflection and examples. A principle drawn from ethnographic fieldwork can serve as a guiding value for interview studies: consider interviews as collaborative encounters in which knowledge and experiences are exchanged rather than extracted. Interview partners have their own motivations and interests in participating in a study, and they can influence the course of a conversation. If given the opportunity, they might suggest different lines of inquiry. Rubin and Rubin (2012) put it this way: "A research relationship imposes obligations on both the interviewer and the interviewee. Conversational partners work with you to answer your research question; they share their thinking and experiences and, in the process, often reveal much of themselves. In turn, you incur an obligation to be honest with your interviewees, to protect them from harm resulting from the research and to make the interview as pleasant as possible" (ibid 72). To conduct ethically sound research, the interviewers are encouraged to continuously reflect on their own motives, background, perspectives, and preliminary assumptions.

Ethical principles have been discussed across various disciplines in the social sciences and humanities and have resulted in several recommendations, for example, the Code of Ethics from the American Sociological Association[10] or the Ethical Guidelines from the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK[11]. These principles prioritise the benefits for research participants and communities while minimising risk and harm during research. Integrity and transparency are two key principles stated in these codes and guidelines, as is the principle of voluntary participation in research. With the spread of ethics committees across universities worldwide, obtaining official research permission through ethical clearance is becoming the norm. Ethics committees require researchers to clearly state how they will protect the rights and dignity of research participants before launching empirical research. Method handbooks and guidelines provide detailed information on central ethical matters, see, for example, the chapter "Ethical issues of interviewing" in Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) or the chapter "How to respect and protect: Ethics of interviewing" in Flick (2022). Useful guidelines and reflection sheets can also be found online, for example, a risk assessment sheet to reflect on aspects related to security when undertaking field research[12].

When preparing a study based on qualitative interviews, researchers should consider obtaining official permission and ethical clearance very early in the research process. This step should be understood as an ethical and legal necessity to protect the researcher and participants, rather than simply a bureaucratic requirement. Obtaining permission from local authorities is crucial before entering the study area. This ensures that there is an accountable body to address any issues that may arise during the research process. Moreover, we recommend establishing a positive and respectful rapport with the local administration and key informants in the area. Having strong local relationships can help facilitate access, build trust, and minimise misunderstandings about the research purpose[13]. In Nampula, the Faculty of Lúrio University sent a letter requesting authorization to conduct research in Namutequeliua to the local authorities. The next step was to contact the Administrative Post of Namutequeliua. There the authorities instructed the secretaries to work with the research team.

Protecting research participants often implies confidentiality and anonymity. This means that their identities should not be revealed to an audience beyond the research project. Most

[10] https://www.asanet.org/about/ethics/
[11] https://www.theasa.org/ethics/
[12] https://www.dgska.de/en/ethics/

crucially, researchers are required to obtain informed consent from interview participants, either by having a consent form signed or by documenting the consent via audio recording. Some interview partners might be hesitant to give full consent before the interview. In this case, researchers might first explain what the consent is about and propose to officially handle the consent form after the interview. If no consent for audio recording is given, researchers might take notes instead and elaborate on the notes after the interview. For further reading on informed consent, we suggest the following publication: "Informed consent in ethnographic research: A common practice facing new challenges" (Huber and Imeri 2021).

In terms of research ethics, the handling of audio files should be well-considered before the interviews. In the case of the GIRT project, we assured interview partners that audio recordings would be used solely for transcription and would be deleted afterwards. Careful handling of personal data helped build trust with research participants.

Please find here some experiences shared from the project GIRT on how to go about informed consent:

"They work hard to earn money, and their time spent providing data for research must be recognised through such allowances."

"In my case, since they were from the informal settlement where their livelihood is not guaranteed, they were in harsh poverty, and they were looking at my hand for money after the interview. Therefore, allowances are crucial to make discussions more open and fruitful."

"These poor women are requested to share their time from whatever activities they use for their daily survival. Hence, they must be compensated for that."

[13] *Considering that Nampula is historically a major opposition stronghold, the city faced pre- and post-electoral instability with huge social and economic impact during the Mozambican general elections in 2024. With the proclamation of the electoral results there was political turmoil throughout the country with signs of extreme violence and loss of lives. The research team felt the need to clarify that they were not linked to any political party and that their aim was merely to conduct the research for scientific purposes even if results were meant to be shared with decision makers at local, regional and national levels. To minimize potential risks and avoid misinformation, the research team at Lúrio University sought authorization from the municipality and worked together with local authorities and women's associations.*

Compensating interview partners for their time and efforts is another very important ethical issue, particularly relevant for people in informal settlements and slums. The following arguments were brought up in the context of the project GIRT for paying small allowances to research participants:

- Women are spending their productive time on the interview.
- Women live very precarious lives.
- Women should be kept involved in the ongoing research.
- Women should be compensated to ensure good data quality.

Team members in GIRT were mostly in favour of compensating interview partners. The following quotations from team members provide evidence of this:

Whether to compensate research participants is up to the researcher or research team and may depend on a multitude of factors. If a research project does not have a budget for any kind of interventions after the exploratory phase, it might be justified to provide at least small allowances to the research participants for transportation, meals and drinks. As the research in the project GIRT has shown, several residents in the Ethiopian and Mozambican settlements had been disappointed by previous research projects that did not yield tangible results. Their motivation to contribute to research endeavours can therefore be low: "They consider it business as usual, as implementation of research projects into action is weak". In the case of the project GIRT, we decided to offer allowances for the validation workshop on the findings from interviews, as well as subsequent transdisciplinary workshops[14] within the project runtime. Participants in these workshops who did not match the interview partners in all cases were compensated for travelling to the event site and spending half a day in group discussions.

Overall, compensating women for their time and contributions significantly enhances the ethical integrity of research conducted in slums and informal settlements. Such compensation demonstrates respect for participants' lived experiences and acknowledges the actual economic and social costs involved, including lost income, domestic responsibilities, and emotional labour. In settings where women's time is often undervalued or taken for granted, fair compensation helps build trust and reciprocity between researchers and participants, reducing power imbalances that frequently characterise research relationships in marginalised areas. From an ethical perspective, this practice embodies core values of respect, dignity, and social justice by recognising women not just as data sources but as knowledgeable actors whose insights are crucial to understanding complex urban realities. Furthermore, compensating participants helps challenge extractive research practices that benefit outside institutions while leaving communities unchanged. Instead, it fosters a more equitable and relational approach to knowledge creation, where women in informal settlements are seen as partners whose time, expertise, and agency are genuinely appreciated.

5.4.2. Data Quality Assurance in Qualitative Research

Studies based on interview material can be assessed against quality criteria for qualitative research. As we have learnt, the central aim of qualitative research is to explore new themes and find new explanations. Although qualitative research is not as standardised as surveys and questionnaires, the activities in the research life cycle follow systematic processes of data creation, organisation and interpretation of materials. Conducting research in a team can improve research quality. When preparing an interview guide or analysing materials, multiple researchers can complement, contest and confirm each other.

[14] *Transdisciplinary research aims to create recommendations for the transformation of structures and systems by means of collaborative work of diverse stakeholders. Bringing together representatives of civil society, political decision makers and academics to develop future scenarios in joint efforts can be one way to implement transdisciplinary research (see Habermann et al. 2013).*

Ensuring data quality in qualitative research is essential for producing credible, trustworthy and meaningful findings. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on the reliability and validity of data through measurement and statistics, qualitative research gives attention to the trustworthiness, which involves the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the data:

- Credibility is the truthfulness or believability of the research findings from the perspective of the study participants.
- Dependability is the stability and consistency of the research process over time and across researchers.
- Confirmability is the degree to which the findings are shaped by the participants and not by researcher bias or personal interest.
- Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied or transferred to other contexts or settings.

Qualitative research "is also evaluated for its richness, vividness, and accuracy in describing complex situations or cultures. The quality of evidence that supports the conclusions is important, as are the soundness of the design and the thoroughness of the data collection and analysis" (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 16).

There are different mechanisms to ensure data quality in qualitative research. These are triangulation, member checking (validation), peer debriefing, audit trail, reflexivity, thick description, data saturation, negative case analysis, inter-coder reliability (in team research), and reliable recording and transcription methods. Each of these techniques is now briefly described:

- **Triangulation:** the use of multiple sources, methods or perspectives to cross-check findings. There are different techniques of triangulation: data triangulation, methodological triangulation, investigator triangulation and theoretical triangulation.
- **Data triangulation:** the use of different data sources, for example, data from interviews, focus group discussions and observations.
- **Methodological triangulation:** is the use of different data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations.
- **Investigator triangulation:** to the involvement of multiple researchers to minimise individual bias.
- **Theoretical triangulation:** the use of different theoretical perspectives to interpret data.
- **Member checking (participant validation):** the process of returning data, interpretations or findings to the study participants for confirmation. This helps the researcher to understand the study participants' perspectives, enhance credibility and reduce data misinterpretation.
- **Rapport establishment:** spending adequate time in the field to deeply understand the context and the study participants. It is also useful for building trust, minimising distortion and

enabling more accurate interpretation.

- **Peer debriefing:** engaging colleagues or experts to review the research process and findings. It strengthens the dependability and confirmability of the data.
- **Audit trail:** keeping detailed records of all research activities and decisions. It includes notes on data collection, analysis and interpretation. This enables others to follow the research logic and verify the conclusions drawn from the study.
- **Reflexivity:** continuous reflection on the researcher's role, assumptions and influence on the research. It is often recorded in reflexive journals and maintains transparency about potential biases.
- **Thick description:** providing rich, detailed accounts of the research context and research participants. It enhances transferability. That means it allows readers to determine whether findings are transferable to other settings.
- **Data saturation:** collecting data until no new themes or insights emerge. Data saturation indicates that the findings are comprehensive and grounded in the data.
- **Negative case analysis:** actively seeking and examining data that contradict emerging patterns or interpretations. This improves data credibility by showing that alternative explanations were considered.
- **Use of reliable recording and transcription methods:** using high-quality audio recorders, accurate transcription practices and checking transcriptions against records.
- **Inter-coder reliability:** comparing and reconciling coding among researchers in team-based studies. It is therefore applicable in team research when multiple researchers code data, compare and reconcile differences in coding to ensure consistent interpretation and strengthened dependability.

One of the techniques used by the GIRT team to ensure data quality was conducting a pilot study before the actual interviewing phase. A pilot study is a small-scale preliminary study conducted before the main research to test the feasibility, time, cost, methods and procedures of the larger study. The pilot study in the project GIRT helped the team to identify and correct potential problems in the research design, data creation, tools and logistics, such as recorders, before the main data collection. The pilot study should make sure that the main study runs smoothly and produces reliable data. For instance, pre-testing the interview guides helped the team to identify the clarity, relevance and cultural appropriateness of the questions. The participants' feedback from the pilot study was used to verify the extent to which the study captures the intended meanings and experiences.

The pilot study in the project GIRT contributed to the generation of relevant data for the themes investigated. It also helped the team identify and revise ambiguous questions or omit leading or overly sensitive questions before the main study. The pilot study also gave researchers a chance to practice interviewing, probing, observing and recording techniques. This increased their competence and reflexivity, reduced interviewers' bias and improved data accuracy. Moreover, the pilot study helped the research team assess the feasibility of the research design, including the time required,

the accessibility of the study participants, and the ethical and logistical constraints. This helped the team make the necessary preparations and mitigate potential factors that might have compromised the data quality. Overall, the pilot study helped the team to refine the instruments and methods. This enhanced the credibility, dependability and confirmability of the data.

Returning results to research participants was an important step in the project GIRT's research process. Unlike many research projects that leave their study sites without informing research participants about their findings, the GIRT project aimed to provide feedback to interview participants on the outcome of the data analysis. The credibility and trustworthiness of the findings are very important. This can also be achieved through communicative validation: returning results to research participants and verifying that interpretations match their understanding of the results.

6. Research Management

6.1. Organising Research Teams

Team research has several advantages over individual research. Teams unite various perspectives and expertise and can approach a problem more holistically. There are also a few disadvantages, including misunderstandings over terms and concepts.

Working in a team requires team members to adhere to the rules agreed upon at the beginning of the research project. These rules include attending meetings, replying to emails, completing assigned tasks, and sharing contributions within set deadlines. "Team members should also be collaborative, responsible, and have good time-management and information-management skills" (Repko and Szostak 2025: 70).

At the beginning of a research project, team-building exercises can help team members identify with and commit to the project. Developing a map with central concepts, technical terms and setting clear priorities in the project can be crucial steps in the first project phase.

Therefore, effective organisation of research teams is a cornerstone of successful project implementation, particularly in contexts such as slums and informal settlements in Ethiopia and Mozambique, where researchers face significant logistical, social, and ethical challenges. A well-coordinated team allows for a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, ensuring that each member understands their tasks in data collection, participant engagement, and ethical compliance.

In these settings, fieldwork often involves navigating complex social networks, language barriers, and culturally sensitive issues, making communication and teamwork crucial for safety and data quality. Proper team organisation also supports timely and well-coordinated planning of field visits, coordination with local authorities, and adaptation to unexpected situations, such as changes in community schedules or access restrictions.

Additionally, structured research teams can maintain strict ethical standards by overseeing informed consent processes, protecting participant confidentiality, and offering support when participants experience distress or vulnerability. By combining logistical efficiency with ethical care, organised research teams improve the study's reliability, validity, and social relevance while building respectful, reciprocal relationships with community participants.

[15] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-priorities/open-science/research-data-management/

6.2. Research Data Management

Research data management refers to the responsible handling of all data throughout the research project lifecycle. This includes all digital and non-digital data generated, processed or analysed. During the research, data must be securely preserved. Researchers are required to take adequate measures to ensure the integrity, availability and confidentiality of data (Dilger et al. 2018). Data protection is particularly important for personal data, that is, data revealing the identity of a person, such as name, address, phone number or other direct and indirect personal identifiers. Researchers should ensure that data about research participants are stored securely so that unauthorised persons cannot access them. Research data management also includes developing a strategy for handling data during data analysis, in publications and after the end of the research project. Tools like data management plans can help establish a coherent strategy for handling all data created in a research process[15]. Dedicated handbooks like "Managing and Sharing Research Data: A Guide to Good Practice" by Louise Corti et al. (2019) give detailed advice on formatting and organising data, storing and transferring data, as well as anonymisation of research data.

In practice, data management requires systematic handling, storage, and protection of interview materials, including audio recordings, field notes, and consent forms. In informal settlement research, ethical data management is especially important due to participants' vulnerability, tenure insecurity, and potential exposure to social or political risks. Audio files and transcripts should be securely stored using password-protected devices and anonymised by removing personal identifiers and location-specific details that could compromise confidentiality (Creswell and Poth 2018; Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Clear protocols for data access, backup, and eventual data disposal help ensure compliance with ethical standards and protect participants' rights.

In the GIRT research project, the interviews were conducted in multilingual slum contexts in Ethiopia and Mozambique. Interviews are often carried out in local languages, requiring careful transcription and, where necessary, translation into a working research language. Maintaining semantic accuracy while preserving culturally embedded meanings, emotions, and expressions is essential (Temple and Young 2004), which constitutes the most essential component of data management. Decisions regarding verbatim versus clean transcription should be guided by the research objectives, with reflexive notes documenting tone, pauses, and non-verbal cues observed during interviews.

Triangulation of data, as a part of data management, by integrating interview data with observations, field notes, and contextual documents, enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Creswell and Poth 2018). Together, careful data management, thoughtful transcription, and reflexive interpretation contribute to ethically sound and analytically robust qualitative findings that faithfully represent lived experiences in the slums and informal settlements of Ethiopia and Mozambique.

7. Context: Women in Precarious Housing Situations in African Cities

7.1. Gender Roles and Gender Equality

In this section, we begin with the postulate that there is no single, universal feminist approach that can be uncritically applied across all contexts. "Women" is not a pre-existing, fixed, or biologically determined category or identity that can simply be applied to persons born with the same sex. The identities of women are shaped by complex political, social and cultural processes resulting from kinship systems, community relations, and historical conditions. Collective identities of women are shaped by local conditions that enable or impede the formation and activities of women's groups and

associations. In this regard, researchers, particularly those based in Western or other highly industrialised contexts, should avoid patronising attitudes and instead respect the local and specific needs and interests of women.

It is also important to understand that not all women, including those facing systemic gender-based disadvantages, share feminist ideas. In this regard, Millen (1997) notes that feminist researchers may often encounter participants whose experiences do not align with or may actively resist feminist views of their realities. Trying to apply these frameworks uncritically can push participants away or overlook their own understanding of themselves. Researchers must, therefore, handle the tension between structural feminist analysis and the participants' own stories with care, humility, and respect.

According to Connell's (1978) theory of gender and power, three distinct but overlapping structures embedded at societal and institutional levels work simultaneously to create gender roles that influence inequities: the sexual division of labour, the sexual division of power and the structure of social norms. These structures are maintained by institutions that create gender-based disparities in access to and control over resources/assets, decision-making authority, and social valuation, such as lower pay, lack of control over resources, and lower expectations for women's roles in society. In the Ethiopian context, gendered power relations often mean that decisions about family issues are predominantly made by men. Men might consult with women, but major decisions are considered within their area of responsibility. Women are mostly accepting of men's decisions, as this is in line with tradition and culture. However, it is important to differentiate between "women" based on their marital status and socio-economic background. For instance, married women, divorced women or widowed women can be equipped with very different financial resources, social capital or entitlements. Very generally speaking, we can differentiate between women in male-headed households and women who are the head of households themselves, each facing different challenges.

Housewives, as an important group of women, are often not enabled to participate in decision-making regarding children, resource management or income-generating activities, even in urban settings. They remain economically dependent on their husbands. The prevailing social norms reproduce disparities in income, decision-making over the use and control of assets, and societal expectations regarding women's roles and contributions. Educated women are more self-aware and find it easier to communicate with their husbands. However, for educated women, the workload is higher: they often face the so-called "triple burdens": working in paid jobs, caring for family members and managing household chores. Community life and occupational segregation are frequently shaped by conservative social norms. There are occupations considered more appropriate for women. According to the idea of the complementarity of men and women, household and reproduction are the spheres of women. Women are deemed better suited for household work than men. If women engage in income-generating activities, they also usually work in lower-paid jobs. Social norms also govern how women deal with their own problems. Even though many women share similar challenges, they don't disclose their problems to the community or family because of social norms that discourage public disclosure of private matters. In Ethiopia, women often find safe spaces for emotional support and informal solidarity in religious activities and through engagement in social groups and networks like Idir[16] or Ekub[17].

[16] *Idir is a traditional Ethiopian community-based association that provides mutual aid, social support, and financial assistance to its members, particularly during significant life events such as funerals, weddings, or illnesses.*

[17] *Ekub is a traditional Ethiopian rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA). Members contribute a fixed sum of money at regular intervals, and one member receives the total collected amount in each round on a rotating basis. It serves as an informal banking system for communities.*

Political power in Ethiopia tends to be gendered, despite policy efforts to increase women's representation in public life. Even if over a third of positions in the national parliament are held by women, their roles in different public affairs remain negligible: As Degefa and Getachew (2022) note, "[...] women members of political parties encounter many barriers, including political violence, male-coded norms and sexist discourses across Ethiopian society. The nature and scale of political violence perpetrated against women is particularly disempowering and affects their ability to participate in political spaces." In Ethiopia, policies often reproduce gender-inequalities. In this regard, Degefa and Getachew (2022) also note, "Many political initiatives designed to tackle gender imbalances often have been driven by short-term political considerations without proper gender-gap assessment and policy analysis. In most cases, the authorities have viewed gender-targeted reforms as acts of benevolence, dispensed by the government, without adopting the legal and financial measures necessary to ensure sustainability and impact". In various regions of Ethiopia, particularly rural areas, gender inequalities are more pronounced than in urban areas. Harmful practices such as early marriage, abduction or female genital mutilation (FGM) are more commonly observed and rooted in local traditions of rural areas.

In Mozambique, women are rarely involved in neighbourhood activities and community-level decision-making. Women are often afraid to speak up in public. This hesitation to share their own ideas stems from fear of contradicting others or making mistakes. Female residents of Mozambican slums and informal settlements tend to be less informed than their male family members- fathers, husbands, brothers or sons. There is limited transparency in management, and the local authorities do not inform residents about ongoing programs or interventions. As the GIRT project has shown in the study site in Nampula, the neighbourhood leader is not known by name. Furthermore, women are often instrumentalised by political parties, usually to participate in electoral campaigns or other political activities, with less emphasis placed on addressing their broader interests or needs.

Women in Mozambique generally face economic barriers to access funding, especially funding from the formal banking system due to the prevailing conditions established through formal employment and land or house tenure. Historically, few women were able to conclude their education; they were stuck in child marriage or with care for their children and family. These structural barriers for women exist particularly with regard to their participation in the public sphere and the economy. Because of matrilineage dominating in the Macua societies in Nampula and other parts of northern Mozambique, the power of women is more balanced at the household level. Here women are able to manage the economic resources and decide about the education of their children. According to post-colonial sociologists and anthropologists such as Signe Arnfred (2010), women in Northern Mozambique learn mechanisms to foster their empowerment through initiation rites, even in the context of educational, political and economic disadvantages. We assume that this is how they find themselves able to build social networks such as the estique saving groups. Estique (from the English word stick) is a common informal saving mechanism for different purposes. The saving groups include mainly women and enable them to pay for school fees for their children, build a house, buy clothes such as capulana[18] and medicine or start a business. There are different types of estique saving groups, with weekly, monthly or annual meetings, and different amounts of savings. The estique also provide a space for encounters and exchange among women, to share ideals and frustrations, design their future and celebrate together.

[18] *A symbolically meaningful wrapping cloth used mainly by women in Mozambique. It is a piece of colourfully printed cotton material, often featuring a strong central design or theme. Women use them as a skirt/a wrapper, or sometimes as a shawl, or as a veil over heads and shoulders in Muslim areas of northern Mozambique; some use them as a sling for carrying babies, or to wrap and carry their belongings. Capulanas are fascinating, because beyond being a useful piece of clothing they are so many other things: identity markers, symbols of love, means of communication and archives of history and memories (Arnfred and Meneses 2019).*

In terms of gender equality, since independence the government in Mozambique has made improvements leading to 50 percent of women in ministerial power (2020/25) and more than 25 percent of women in the parliament where the leading seats have been occupied by women since 2000. The same is true at the magistrate level, provincial governments and public institutions. At the municipality level progress has been slower so far. In Mozambique, wages and salaries are set based on competences and qualifications. Women must not be discriminated because of their gender. However, only women working in formal labour market have access to social benefits such as maternity leave.

Gender-sensitive methodologies ought to consider women's spheres of action. Feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding 2004) underscores the importance of recognising the voices of women and other less powerful groups as valid sources of knowledge. A standpoint can be understood as an alternative oppositional vision to marginalising and oppressing ways of living and knowing. Put otherwise, a standpoint is a cognitive, psychological and political tool for more adequate knowledge. Standpoint epistemology is about including voices that could make knowledge more accurate. Such a theory prioritises lived experience and reveals how power shapes what is considered appropriate knowledge.

However, being a female researcher does not, by itself, create equality between the researcher and the female research participant. As Millen (1997) points out, just because research participants have similar gender or cultural backgrounds, it does not necessarily eliminate the inherent power differences present in the research encounter. Feminist researchers should be willing to consider the possibility that their theoretical perspectives may not align or even conflict with participants' understandings. This requires an ongoing process of reflexivity - not only regarding one's own positionality, but also regarding the possibility of epistemological difference between the researcher and participant.

Feminist methodologies also need to be careful about generalising approaches that assume a shared meaning of concepts like "oppression" or "gender equality." As Millen (1997) warns, such feminist methodological concepts or tools developed in Western societies will not always work, particularly when working with women who may have a different analytical lens. Context-sensitive work requires adaptation to local meanings, values, and social rules, rather than assuming the global applicability of internationally circulating feminist principles.

Standpoints, therefore, come into existence through a transformation of habits of perception, thinking and doing that happen through attachment to concerns, interests and commitments. Accordingly, a meaningful engagement requires efforts to reflect on positionality and build trust.

To operationalise a standpoint in research practice, we recommend recruiting local women researchers to conduct interviews in a culturally appropriate way and document the researcher's positionality through reflexive journaling. Even when there are shared culture and nationality between the researcher and the participants, establishing trust by clearly communicating how the interview data will be used is crucial. Here, Finch (1984) notes that building trust and using the information shared by female research participants responsibly are central. Researchers are also requested to take all necessary precautionary measures to prevent harm to the research participants. Another possible strategy is to use community validation workshops to ensure that the researchers' interpretations align with participants' realities. Moreover, co-developing interview guides, by giving research participants/stakeholders a chance to contribute, can help ensure that they reflect shared priorities and concerns.

In the case of the GIRT project, where researchers and research participants share the same

national, cultural and political background, equality is not necessarily granted. Power differences between women may pertain to age, education, socio-economic status, marital status, and other factors. Intersectionality refers to the interrelationships among gender categories and other socio-demographic and socially relevant categories, such as class, ethnicity or political affiliation. In the Ethiopian context of the project GIRT, intersectionality seems especially relevant when it comes to women with disabilities and internally displaced women. In the context of the Macua societies in Nampula, Mozambique, intersectionality was a crucial concept to understand the livelihoods of women, for example female entrepreneurs selling their goods and services close to their courtyard.

Please find here recommendations and experiences from researchers in the project GIRT on how to build rapport and reduce power differences when interviewing women:

Respectfull expression	Use of non-judgemental language
"Talking respectfully, giving space for free expression regardless of level of education, showing the benefits of research for improving neighbourhood conditions."	"I used respectful, non-judgmental language and related to their concerns as someone from the same region, which helped build trust and made it easier for them to open up."

Researchers are invited to continuously reflect upon power relations and hierarchies. Marginalised women might be more inclined to what Dotson (2011) calls "testimonial smothering", meaning that they underemphasise unjust treatment, structural violence or other discriminating practices because they want to protect their families and communities, or they are not confident that researchers will understand what they say. Interviewing such participants can require a lot of encouragement from the researchers: "They are less confident and shy. This requires strategies to help them express their ideas freely".

We recommend including female researchers equally at all stages of the research process to better represent local feminist epistemologies. Participation of female researchers can contribute to shifts in consciousness by raising awareness of inequalities, promoting more equitable research practices and using gender-inclusive language. Recent developments, such as gender mainstreaming activities and affirmative action at Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia, as well as the implementation of the Higher Education Institutions Gender Equality Plan in Mozambique and the Gender Equity Strategy at Lúrio University (2020/25), can show the way forward toward greater gender equality.

7.2. Women in Urban Informal Settlements and Slums

The legal status of land ownership and tenure security remains one of the most pressing challenges in the day-to-day life of residents in Ethiopian informal settlements. Lack of formal recognition and legal documentation for their homes makes many residents vulnerable to forced eviction and displacement. Conducting research in these settlements requires prior understanding of the context. Doubts about whether the residents in informal settlements will accept researchers were prevalent among GIRT team members. Since they do not have tenure security or live without formal lease agreements, their feeling of insecurity significantly shapes their perceptions of external people,

including researchers.

During the GIRT project period from 2022 to 2026, conditions in informal settlements in Bahir Dar and Mekelle were shaped differently by political, economic and demographic factors. Due to land scarcity and financial pressures in Mekelle, land with smaller investments was sometimes used as a source of income. Residents claimed that their land had been legalised by the local administration. Even in urban slum areas, the Ethiopian government-led riverside and corridor development initiatives were accompanied by residents' fear of demolition of their houses and resettlement: "The most serious issue was to take care of questions dealing with displacement. Dislocation of houses was a serious issue at the time of the interview, as other parts of the city were also affected". Researchers therefore need to be aware that their presence in that locality may be considered by residents as government surveillance, especially if the research topic is related to housing or land.

Land-related tensions in informal settlements and slums have consequences for a research project. Please find here some experiences from the project GIRT:

"As the settlers believe that they are disadvantaged, due consideration to their responses is important in comparison to facts or scientific ideas."

"Some participants urgently seek solutions to their challenges, particularly due to their strong desire to secure land tenure and gain access to essential services. They were interested in talking about it."

"The residents were terrified and eager to discuss social matters, and their sense of alienation was caused by their forced displacement."

The above-mentioned accounts by researchers reveal that residents of informal settlements and slums feel marginalised and disregarded by formal authorities because they live under insecure tenure conditions.

In contrast to Ethiopia, living in an informal settlement in Mozambique does not necessarily constitute a barrier to accessing basic services provided by governmental companies such as electricity and tap water. If residents in informal settlements have the necessary financial resources to pay for those services, they can be connected to the infrastructure. The real challenge for women in informal settlements is thus not the access but the quality and regularity of the services.

Women in informal settlements may also be vulnerable to various forms of human rights abuses. Threats of eviction cause constant fear and can evoke hostilities among the residents: "Very few interviewees might be offensive. They might be emotionally driven by their grievances against other bodies: 'Aha! You come to us for eviction. You good-for-nothing people, you are here again, what do you want this time!?'" The vulnerabilities of women may be compounded by intersecting factors, including poverty, caregiving responsibilities, and marital status. The freedom of women to participate in an interview and openly share information may be limited, particularly if their husbands or male household members are nearby. Researchers must therefore carefully select interview settings, considering the privacy and security of women research participants. Interviews conducted at women's homes may be comfortable for them, as they ensure familiarity, but there may be issues

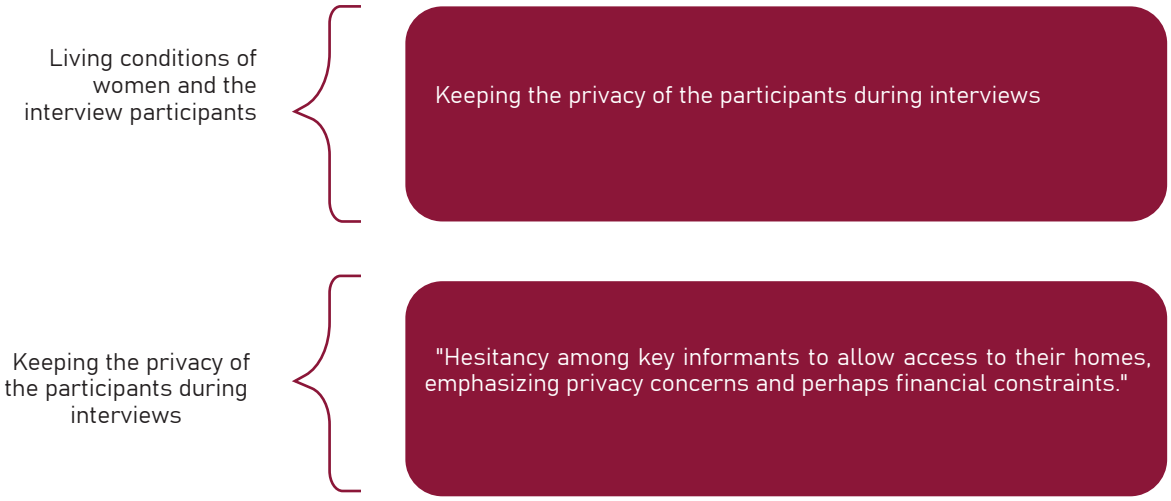
with interruptions or privacy due to surveillance by family members. Researchers should therefore also think of alternative venues for interviews.

Team members of the project GIRT revealed that conducting interviews at participants' homes can be associated with efficient time use and a familiar atmosphere: "The interviews were conducted in familiar, safe places (in their own homes) to reduce intimidation and provide flexibility by allowing them to attend any family duties they had during the interview". However, in crowded settings such as slums, this could mean that family members or neighbours can listen in. Female interview partners might be especially fearful of their husbands' control: "Usually male husbands would like to hear what is going on, being in a very close proximity". Interruptions are likely to occur frequently when interviewing women at home. This might provide another reason to arrange interviews at an easily accessible, secure and comfortable location, for example, the university campus or schools.

In Nampula, Mozambique, interviewing women at their homes meant interruptions due to costumers coming to buy at their small businesses in the courtyards but also because of preparing meals for lunch or supper or getting the children ready for school.

If researchers choose to interview female research participants at home, they should be attentive to the women's needs and avoid being too intrusive. This could mean not entering their homes but instead conducting the interview in the courtyard or in front of the house.

Please find here some experiences from team members of the project GIRT:



Other issues to be considered by researchers include site selection and research continuity. If unforeseen circumstances, such as overnight demolition of the houses or imminent eviction, occur, researchers might need to select an alternative comparable study site to continue their research. This was also the case in the GIRT project: In the second project year, the researchers in Addis Ababa shifted their study site from an informal settlement on the outskirts of town to an inner urban slum precisely because of land-related insecurities. Assessing feasibility before the research phase and maintaining flexible research plans are vital. Researchers might also face temporally restricted access to a study site. Keeping in contact with key persons by phone can facilitate rescheduling research encounters in case of governmental interventions, security concerns, tumultuous reactions after elections or other events.

In Mozambique, many of the women interviewed in Nampula have lived in their neighbourhood for

more than ten years and have acquired customary rights to the land. Attachment to place appeared moderate in the Nampula case, as several female residents indicated that they would agree to leave the settlement in exchange for fair compensation.

Conducting research with people in precarious housing situations can also be affected by the state of infrastructure and services. Living situations in informal settlements and slums are not homogeneous, but researchers should expect to encounter often harsh conditions. Particularly in informal settlements, roads are often difficult to access. Absence of essential amenities in informal settlements and slums is often evident, with inadequate water supply, sanitation challenges, and unmanaged solid waste. Infectious diseases and health issues caused by water and air pollution can occur. Even where electricity is available, certain areas may experience inconsistent supply, with frequent outages. Under these circumstances, tolerance of the researchers is vital, because the living conditions might be uncomfortable[19].

In areas such as informal settlements and slums where social exclusion and poverty are severe, security risks may also arise. Researchers, therefore, need to consider the precautionary measures in advance to address security concerns. Women in Namutequeliua, the study site in Nampula, Mozambique, mentioned insecurity issues, especially in the evenings due to lack of public lighting and confined passages. Please find here some recommendations concerning security precautions by team members of the project GIRT:

Respectfull expression	Scanning local context before interviews	Researchers' avoidance of risks	Poverty and security
"We engaged some people living around there to get information about the security of the study area, and the needs and concerns of the community. We also had a letter from our university for accountability and informed consent to maintain the confidentiality of their responses."	"Before conducting interviews, it's essential to first assess the area for security and health risks. This includes checking for safety concerns, understanding the local environment, and ensuring there are no immediate health threats. It's also advisable to consult with local contacts to gather information and prepare for any challenges that may arise."	"Researchers should take care of security issues, as the community is very poor. Most youth have no job or income. Of course, I have not encountered any security-related issues in conducting this study, but that does not mean there will be none elsewhere. Hence, it is better to take care of it."	"In exceptional cases, security might thus also be an issue if poverty and hopelessness are widespread in the local community."

We conclude with a general note: research on informal settlements, particularly research focusing on women, is a sensitive undertaking that requires contextual awareness and ethical rigour. To conduct research in these contexts, researchers should be prepared for possible infrastructural, social, and political complications and remain flexible and responsive to the complex realities encountered by research participants.

[19] *Researchers should also follow advice from national or local health agencies. These can relate to good hygiene as seen during the COVID19 pandemic or precautionary measures in case of extreme weather events.*

8. 10-Step Guide for Interviewing

8.1. Preparing Yourself for an Interview

Interviews can be used to explore issues about which we do not know much. Researchers might have their own subjective theories about such issues, but they often lack empirical evidence. Researchers must first of all become knowledgeable about the research topic, including potential controversies surrounding it in the local context. This includes anticipating and being prepared to answer any questions participants may have about it. For research teams with members from different disciplines and backgrounds, it can be useful to clarify what each member can contribute in terms of disciplinary knowledge, language skills or other relevant insights. All researchers should become aware of their assumptions and verify their plausibility or reflect critically on their positionality – that is, how their background and perspective could shape data collection and interpretation. Only then should they continue discussing what questions to ask and how. We invite researchers to critically interrogate their main guiding questions regarding focus, cultural appropriateness, language adequacy and comprehensibility.

Formulating gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate questions implies reflecting upon what is considered sensitive at the research site. The sensitivity of topics cannot always be assumed from an outsider perspective and may significantly vary across communities and time periods. Taking the example of livelihood situations in Ethiopian informal settlements, we had assumed in our preparations that tenure security or food security might turn out to be delicate issues. We were prepared to receive evasive answers or silence when asking questions regarding these two thematic areas. But compared to other issues related to private and intimate matters, talking about housing and living in informal settlements and slums turned out less intrusive than expected:

"Women often feel ashamed to share sensitive information like sexual behaviours when interviewed by male researchers, but in the case of this study, I did not encounter anything special, as the topic is not as such sensitive, and I established adequate rapport with them".

In Nampula, Mozambique, sanitation-related aspects were shared without hesitation by the women interviewed in the GIRT project.

We suggest gaining in-depth knowledge about the current local issues at the study site before making up strategies for dealing with potentially sensitive issues. Visiting the study site before the interviews and conducting preliminary observations can help better adjust the interview questions. We also suggest conducting pre-tests to probe reactions to the questions asked:

"The researchers who wish to perform similar investigations should first visit the study location before undertaking the main task to be conscious of health-related conditions and security concerns, as well as to adhere to societal norms and expectations. Second, the research team needs to conduct a pilot study before the main data collection. That would be beneficial for understanding women's issues and crucial for tailoring the queries to meet the needs of the target women."

"We did a pilot study both to check how clear the questions were for them and to make us familiar with talking about sensitive issues like tenure security."

"The lesson I learnt from the interviews was that more effort should be put into planning and designing the data collection. Second, it is always good to do a pilot test."

The main takeaway from the previously cited texts is that piloting was both a methodological tool for improving questions and a relational tool for increasing interviewer confidence and developing cultural sensitivity.

The GIRT project showed that the sensitivity of topics is not fixed – it can vary between study sites and change over time. Please find here some experiences and recommendations shared from the project GIRT on preparing interviews and handling sensitive issues. One strategy noted by GIRT field researchers was to minimise emotional discomfort on sensitive issues by using indirect questioning and being aware of emotions:

"We tried to normalise the sensitive issues like tenure security by letting the interviewees know that they are not alone in this. Then we indirectly reframed the questions rather than asking them directly and bluntly, and mainly remained flexible and emotionally attuned to their reactions and responses, changing or moving to the questions and coming back later when they feel relaxed and open to answering".

This method shows how flexible and caring interviewing techniques can help researchers collect sensitive information without bringing about distress or resistance.

At one site	In another site	Overall
"Tenure security and some parts of governance themes were a very sensitive issue, so we tried to avoid direct questions about it and insert it when discussing issues like infrastructure, economic activities, and livelihood."	"To help participants feel at ease, I began by engaging in casual conversations about their families and other light topics before the formal interview commenced. This approach aimed to create a comfortable atmosphere, encouraging them to share their experiences openly and without hesitation."	"Researchers should build trust by starting with relatable conversations and making women feel heard, rather than jumping into sensitive topics right away. Showing empathy and understanding will prevent defensiveness and maintain trust. It's important to ensure they feel comfortable and supported throughout the process."

Successful preparation for interviews in informal and sensitive contexts demands:

- Careful consideration of ethical and administrative procedures in advance.
- Team reflexivity and awareness of researchers' positionalities.
- Pilot testing and an iterative process in developing questions.
- Broad socio-cultural awareness and attention to gender-sensitive language.
- Flexibility regarding wording and order of sensitive questions.
- A respectful approach to build trust with participants.

8.2. Gaining Access

Gaining access to participants is a strategic and ethical undertaking, not merely a logistical one. Getting in contact with interview participants in urban informal settlements and slums can be arranged with the help of key informants and local gatekeepers - individuals who hold trust within the community and have deep familiarity with the needs and norms of the community. Key informants are persons who are knowledgeable about a research area. Researchers might first explain their research interests to them and ask them for a general assessment. Key informants can often suggest potential interview partners.

In Ethiopia, these key informants possibly comprise woreda[20] staff (local district representatives), kebele administration (local administration head, local authorities, local officials), youth actively involved in specific blocks, Limat Gujule[21] members (women's development groups) or local community leaders in general. In the case of Mozambique, the key informants include block leaders together with the neighbourhood secretaries. During workshop meetings key persons also encompassed women representing tufu[22] groups and women's associations for cleaning public space.

The exact procedure or order to contact key informants and potential interview partners needs to be negotiated with the persons in question. The process should also be negotiated respectfully and transparently. Please find here one example from Ethiopia in the project GIRT: "We first contacted the woreda/district administration office. Then, the office assigned guides for us from the community. The guiders helped us to locate the houses of the study participants, and we conducted the interviews at their homes".

For the research team in Nampula, Mozambique, it was easy to establish contacts, proceed with the site visits and organise the interviews with the residents because some team members had been engaged with the same community in previous studies. In addition to the guidance from the neighbourhood secretaries' assistants and block leaders, some study assistants in the project GIRT had been living in the same neighbourhood and in the vicinity. This was very helpful to make appointments, locate the houses of the interview participants and sometimes to give advice on the best moment for conducting the interviews.

Alternatively, or in addition to official gatekeepers, people who have lived in the settlement for a longer period can also serve as key informants. Whom to choose as key informants depends not only on officially requested or socially desirable procedures but also on expectations concerning trust and cooperation, reciprocity and exchange. Friendly and trusting relations with one set of insiders may result in unfriendly and hostile relations with others in the setting, so be careful whom to include and in what order.

In many qualitative studies conducted in urban informal settlements and slums, the sampling process falls into the category of purposive or snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling method used to reach hard-to-reach, hidden, and vulnerable populations. In the project GIRT, the team members in Mekelle, for example, started with female members of Limat Gujule as selected key informants in the study area. The key informants were approached in the initial stage of the research phase. By referring to the selection criteria provided by the researchers, the Limat Gujule members referred to possible candidates for an interview.

[20] *The third level of administrative division, a district-level unit that falls under zones and regional states.*

[21] *Local women's development group in Ethiopia, the name specifically applies for the Tigray region.*

[22] *Tufu is a traditional dance with high symbolic value for women in coastal areas of Nampula. It symbolises the beauty of Macua women.*

In the case of Nampula, female interview participants were selected with the indication of neighbourhood secretaries and block leaders as well as with the indication of previously interviewed women.

Once the contacts to potential interview participants are identified, researchers can start scheduling face-to-face meetings with persons interested. It might be advisable to call interview partners (or key informants) shortly before the scheduled interview to find out about the local situation, any potential disruptions or participants' availability. If there is no possibility to confirm the appointment, researchers may want to consider waiting for some time or returning to the site another time. Female residents might also be busy with their daily activities when arriving at the study site. In this case, researchers should not expect them to suspend or stop their activities immediately. It is often better to fix an appointment for another day when the women are free. A respectful and flexible interview approach is crucial, particularly when working with female participants in busy urban informal settings.

Researchers of the project GIRT recommend creating a favourable, non-threatening and comfortable atmosphere for female residents. This includes approaching women with people acquainted with them and introducing yourself to the interview participants. Researchers should ensure that all necessary information about the interview procedures is provided to women who agreed to participate. Please find here some experiences and recommendations shared from the project GIRT on how to make female interview participants feel at ease and how to ensure their willingness and readiness to share experiences without hesitation or shame:

Willingness

"What I did first was make them have a clear understanding of the objectives of the research project. The next step was to obtain their consent and ensure their willingness to share their lived experiences in the informal settlement. After that, they were very much supportive in every activity and shared their experiences in the informal settlement."

Post-war interviews

"The time we were conducting the interview was post-war. Most tenure and food security problems affected the entire community. Also, asking about the community helped to gain an understanding of the practices that might be shameful for them to admit."

How to approach sensitive questions...

"First, I discussed with them about the issues of tenure or food security in the community in general. And step by step, I came to their personal experiences."

It is equally important to manage interview partners' expectations, which is often a challenge for researchers. We recommend assessing their hopes, fears and beliefs regarding the research project as best as possible because they will influence their willingness to collaborate and the direction of their answers. These two learnings from the project GIRT demonstrate the diverse range of

expectations by residents in informal settlements and slums: “The female interview participants expected to see positive changes, such as financial support for their problems, justice, and improved tenure security. Some also hoped that the research would lead to tangible solutions”. However, not all reactions are positive. In some cases, researchers experienced what is commonly called 'research fatigue.' This is a type of disengagement caused by repeated data collection efforts that do not bring any visible impact on the community. Other women in other locations or at different points in time can have very different expectations, as this quote shows: “Residents were fed up with interviews. They mentioned that various organisations have contacted them for different kinds of interviews in the past multiple times and that they are fed up with answering questions with no solutions to their challenges”. This highlights the need for clear communication about research goals and for managing expectations with participants, especially in communities that have gone through several unreturned engagements.

8.3. Conducting Interviews

Interviewing is a research method that follows a systematic process of data generation. However, interviewers should also treat their research partners with courtesy, respect and cultural sensitivity. Before starting an interview, the researcher should thank the interview participants for taking the time to speak with her/him and briefly reintroduce the purpose of the study in simple and clear terms. The researcher should then present herself/himself to the interview partner and inform her on how long the interview is expected to last. The researcher should not forget to grant confidentiality and anonymity: “I openly told them that their response is anonymous, and that the data will be used for research purposes”. Where feasible and culturally appropriate, researchers should seek written informed consent to be interviewed and recorded before starting the interview. If written consent is problematic, a clearly documented verbal consent may be more appropriate. In conducting an effective interview, location highly matters. If possible, choose a quiet and private space, free of distractions, to conduct the interview.

In the context of Mozambique, in some conservative settings the dress of the interviewer is crucial, especially for female interviewers. Women sometimes have to consider avoiding short skirts or putting some peace of capulana on top of waist-down dresses. In the case of Namutequeliua, women dressing in trousers is more acceptable nowadays.

Researchers should carefully consider suitable locations for the interviews. Conducting interviews at interview participants’ homes goes along with efficient time use and a familiar atmosphere, as one GIRT team member recounts: “The interviews were conducted in familiar, safe places (in their own homes) to reduce intimidation and provide flexibility by allowing them to attend any family duties they had during the interview”. However, in crowded settings such as slums, this could mean that family members or neighbours can listen in. Female interview partners might be especially fearful of their husbands’ control: “Usually male husbands would like to hear what is going on, being in a very close proximity”. Interruptions are likely to occur frequently when interviewing women at home. This might provide another reason to arrange interviews at an easily accessible, secure and comfortable location, for example, the university campus or schools.

If researchers choose to interview female research participants at home, they should be attentive to the women’s needs and avoid being too intrusive. This could mean not entering their homes but instead conducting the interview in the courtyard or in front of the house.

It is recommended to balance questions about personal situations and perceptions of the neighbourhood. Researchers might first ask broader questions and later narrower ones, allowing interview partners to raise new issues at the beginning of the interview. Sensitive issues like tenure

security or food security might be better addressed later in the interview. Such gradual progression helps build trust. The methodological literature also suggests starting with questions related to experiences and behaviour before launching questions on opinions and values (see Brett and Wheeler 2022: 42). Particularly when interviewing women in informal settlements and slums, arranging research settings where interview partners feel safe is crucial: "Women are often shy to provide information. It is critical to establish trust through encouraging and motivating them".

As a rule, we recommend open-ended, assumption-free and non-leading questions. These can be questions starting with what?, how?, who? and when?. You may also ask for examples. Let the interview participants tell their stories and explain their situation and listen carefully. Try also to become aware of nonverbal communication to facilitate the interview.

Interviewers should be flexible with the order of subtopics and questions and follow the logic of the interview partners when elaborating on the research subject: "We made sure the questions were open-ended and gentle as much as possible so that it would give them control and respect for their experiences". Researchers should ask follow-up questions (some of which may be scripted in the interview guide) to elicit participants' complete knowledge and experience related to the research topic. Let the interview participants elaborate on their responses to address any uncertainties, to learn as much as possible about the research topic!

8.4. Managing Unforeseen Events

Researchers should be prepared to encounter unexpected circumstances when interviewing women in informal settlements and slums. Instead of avoiding these challenges, researchers might benefit from developing adaptive strategies to navigate them. A frequent source of disturbance is noise, particularly when interviews take place close to roads. There can be sounds of cars, motorbikes, trains, passers-by or calls to prayer, all of which may interfere with the interview process. A researcher reflects on how challenging it is to conduct interviews in densely populated informal settlements: "As there were a lot of people gathering around the houses, there were noise disturbances and other distractions".

For the study site in Namutequeliua in Mozambique, the proximity to the international airport in Nampula, the regional railways linking Nampula to the seaside and to Malawi as well as the highway close-by have shown to be potentially distracting during interviews.

In areas with precarious housing conditions, crowded living conditions are expected. Researchers should anticipate the presence of many children nearby and expect disruptions by family members or neighbours. Herein, a researcher shares how the flow of an interview was affected by spontaneous interruptions by neighbours: "Neighbours came to ask for something. I had to wait for them to leave. When they took longer, the respondents usually let their neighbours know that they would get back to them later". This reveals how community interconnectedness can shape the interview dynamics. Researchers should understand that this is part of everyday life in such informal settings. Patience and cultural sensitivity are therefore crucial in such situations.

Depending on the time of the day and the daily routines of female interview participants, disruptions may also arise from household chores and family responsibilities. Researchers should be flexible with timing, be willing to resume the interview after a pause, and give participants the time they need to complete tasks. Some GIRT team members also suggested offering help with women's day-to-day activities, such as meal preparation or childcare, to build rapport and show empathy.

Particularly during interviews with women, interruptions may occur when their husbands arrive. Husbands may want to be informed about what is happening. One female GIRT team member

describes how she handled such a situation: "It was when I interviewed a married woman. The interruption was when her husband came home. I paused the interview, greeted him and explained why I was there and what issues I was discussing with his wife. Then he recognised my presence, went back, and let us continue". Researchers need to be aware that gendered power dynamics may affect interviews with women. Explaining the research purpose clearly and respectfully to male relatives can help avoid misunderstandings and maintain the validity of the interview process.

Researchers should also be prepared for potential safety risks. This includes carrying along a mobile phone, having emergency contacts (for example, the gatekeepers or key informants), and preparing contingency plans in place. Having the contact of a trusted taxi driver can also be very useful. Travelling to the study as a team is advisable to enhance safety.

8.5. Dealing with Difficult Emotions

Interviewers need to be sensitive to their own emotions as well as those of their interview partners. Researchers' emotional state and preconceptions may influence how questions are asked and how answers are interpreted: "Researchers need to be cautious not to impose their expectations on interviewees and should remain aware of how their expectations affect what they see and hear" (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 16).

Entering the study site with realistic expectations can help researchers cope with difficult emotions, but they should be prepared to face emotions such as sadness, despair, sorrow, shame or anger. These emotions may be triggered by observing congested areas lacking basic amenities, such as sanitation. Reflecting on the interview situation, a GIRT team member reflects: "Almost all women are living with a low standard of living, so I feel bad seeing them living in such a condition". For local researchers familiar with the context, encountering such problems of female interview partners may not be so surprising. However, even local researchers may not be aware of the depth and complexity of social problems. One researcher shares a moment of emotional identification with participants in a post-conflict setting: "Since we are also victims of the conflict, it was rather a similar feeling with the interviewees, but it was difficult to see mothers struggling to cope with the post-conflict challenges of their own, mostly". Not only post-conflict situations can trigger moments of emotional distress, but also post-electoral periods can bring harsh experiences as we noted with women during the validation workshop. Mozambique had experienced very violent post-electoral turmoil in the 2023 local elections and the 2024 national elections. Furthermore, sad experiences are related to climate change events, for example the 2024 cyclones which heavily affected Nampula city and province, with some of the women interviewed having lost their houses and other means of income during this natural disaster. While shared experiences foster empathy and trust, they can also reinforce emotional distress.

Researchers should be aware of their own limitations in doing research in informal settlements and slums. Most often, when confronted with hopes and expectations for solving problems, they are unable to provide immediate, tangible support to residents. A researcher expressed frustration regarding the limited ability to provide tangible help: "It touched my heart when they vividly told me what their problem was; and I was the one who did nothing other than disseminate the findings to the academic community". Being transparent about one's role and research scope can help reduce feelings of frustration. Researchers are encouraged to remain focused and keep the research goal in mind so as not to get too distracted by one's own emotions: "The way they narrated their poverty, food insecurity, and health conditions touched my heart. But I tried to focus on getting the information I wanted instead of being overwhelmed by the feelings alone".

Ideally, researchers should be empathetic to the emotional content of the interviewee's responses.

Researchers are thus asked to monitor their emotions and avoid blaming or criticising the research participants. They should regularly self-reflect, asking whether they showed disapproval, insisted, started arguing or skipped over some responses that needed comment. The interviewers will not always be able to provide answers or give suggestions, particularly when discussing political issues such as the governmental decision in one of the study sites to relocate the residents to another area. A researcher describes the emotional complexity of interviews with a resident whose social ties are threatened by displacement: "During the interview, there was both laughing and crying. Since my interview topic was social capital, they started smiling as they discussed their previous social relationships and the time they spent together in their area. Nonetheless, they were saddened and depressed about leaving the location where they had spent so much time of their lives".

Strategies to calm interview participants becoming too emotionally charged usually depend on the specific context. Examples from the project GIRT show how team members navigated such situations: "I focused on actively listening and empathising with their emotions. When difficult topics arose, I reminded them to appreciate their strengths, like the well-being of their children. Many women became more comfortable as the conversation went on, appreciating the chance to talk and share their feelings". Researchers must therefore be aware of techniques such as active listening to effectively support emotionally charged interviews. In exceptional cases, it may be appropriate for the researchers to pause the interview and turn off the recording to let the interview partner calm down: "During the interview, one participant began to cry while remembering her deceased husband, especially as we discussed income and financial support. We paused for about 45 minutes, allowing her to express her emotions freely. We listened patiently and empathetically, creating a safe and supportive space". Flexibility and emotional sensitivity are therefore essential.

This example demonstrates the importance of allowing sufficient time per interview. Researchers should also be aware that interview scheduling should not be too tight. To gain reliable insights into women's experiences – particularly from women of various backgrounds, including those who are not easy to access – researchers should be careful to choose an appropriate and convenient timing. In the worst case, the interview could also be rescheduled or even terminated. Interview participants always have the right to withdraw from an interview and to have the interview omitted from data analysis.

We recommend scheduling post-interview debriefing sessions with team members. These sessions give researchers the opportunity to reflect on interview experiences. Researchers can assess the course of their interviews, strengths and weaknesses, difficulties encountered, and strategies to overcome them. They can also share key insights, challenges, participant emotions, ethical concerns, and interview effectiveness.

8.6. Closing Interview Sessions

To conclude an interview, researchers may summarise key themes raised by the interviewee. Otherwise, a question explicitly addressing the future could be presented to the interview partner at the end of the interview. Researchers should show gratitude for the time allocated for the interview and, optionally, offer small expense allowances. They can also ask interview participants for feedback. If needed, researchers should be willing to clarify the interview's purpose again. Expectations may have changed during the interview, and managing expectations for possible follow-up research may remain necessary even after the interview.

Please find here some experiences shared from the project GIRT concerning the closing of interview sessions:

> "The women believed the questions were about their immediate food needs and other fundamental necessities. But after the interview, they conveyed optimism and pessimism. Optimism: They anticipated the project would return with some sort of answer to their problems. Pessimism: They saw my interview as similar to previous interviews in which they recognised their response just for academic knowledge development with no practical relevance".

Researchers should therefore manage expectations ethically and ensure participants' understanding of the academic and policy-oriented nature of the research. Another team member of GIRT described participants' appreciation for being heard:

> "They appreciated the study, described that I was the first person to ask them about their problems and thanked me for doing that by emphasising that the study should be translated into actual interventions that will address their problems".

Research participants' interest in continued engagement beyond data collection was also reported by one of the researchers of the project GIRT:

> "Most of the women insisted on not being left after collecting the data, but to engage with them on facing the prevailing challenges of life, including income, etc."

8.7. Postprocessing Data

Before analysing interview contents, researchers should transcribe the recordings. Transcribing involves converting audio recordings into full, accurate, word-for-word written texts. The data collected in interviews are largely unstructured and may sometimes appear incoherent at first glance. Transcription prepares the data for systematic analysis. Working with interview transcriptions has the advantage that reading transcripts is often quicker than listening to the recordings. Even with (semi-)automatic digital transcription tools, transcribing remains a time-consuming task. Researchers should not underestimate the effort required to transform audio recordings into written text. There are more and less complex transcription systems, developed by researchers with a background in discourse analysis and conversation analysis. A simpler transcription format is presented in King et al. (2019), with suggestions on transcribing pauses and interruptions, emphasis, overlapping speech, audibility problems, non-verbal communication, and so on.

Please find here some experiences shared from the project GIRT about the postprocessing of interview recordings:

Researchers are advised to take notes of ideas, questions or assumptions while transcribing. You can write down your thoughts in a separate memo. Methods handbooks also suggest highlighting significant quotes as well as summarising each interview: "In addition to your memo file and list of catchy quotes, you should write a summary of the contents of each interview to help later on when you compare what was said across interviews. The summary should include the main points expressed, the name (or pseudonym) of the interviewee, the time and location of the interview, the reasons the interviewee was included in the study, and the length of the interview. A good summary should highlight insights the interviewee provided" (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 192).

Translating interview transcripts is equally demanding and time-consuming. Translation should always be considered as interpretive and partial. Researchers in the project GIRT reported challenges in translating the interviews: "Finding exact English equivalents for words and expressions during translation and transcription from Tigrinya was challenging, as it was difficult to capture the full meaning and nuance of what was expressed in the original language". In the case of Nampula, words like capulana are very specific to the Mozambican context. The significance of capulana is hard to translate to Portuguese or English, so we opted not translating but describing.

- To support systematic analysis, we recommend creating a complete "case file" for each interview immediately after transcription (and translation, where relevant). A case file bundles the transcript with:
- the interview summary,
- the memo file (ideas, assumptions, questions and reflections), and
- key metadata (e.g., site, interview date, interviewer, language and duration).

This ensures that all researchers draw on the same contextual information when comparing across interviews.

Data cleaning is part of postprocessing. Before importing transcripts into the coding software, researchers should check whether the transcript is complete and internally consistent (speaker turns, questions and answers, missing sections, and obvious transcription/translation errors).

8.8. Analysing Data

Thematic analysis is a basic approach for qualitative data analysis, encompassing descriptive and interpretive coding. It aims to define overarching themes that characterise key concepts in the analysis. As a principle, it emphasises balancing within-case and cross-case analysis. The second principle states that researchers should balance clarity and inclusivity (see King et al. 2019).

Content analysis of interview transcripts involves indexing, coding, and categorising single items of information contained in the interview participants' statements. Coding interview transcripts involves assigning codes to each section of the transcript. A code is a brief description of the content of qualitative data; it functions like a tag for a portion of the transcribed interview. Similar content is tagged by the same code in all interview transcripts. Some codes may already be identified before data analysis by deriving codes from the conceptual framework or from the interview guide. Based on the detailed research questions, you may draft a preliminary list of topics (codes) that you expect to come up in the interviews and about which you need to collect information to be able to answer the research questions. This preliminary list of codes will then be enlarged, refined, and adapted during the actual coding process. Creating codes and revising the codebook can be considered an ongoing

[23] https://openqda.org/

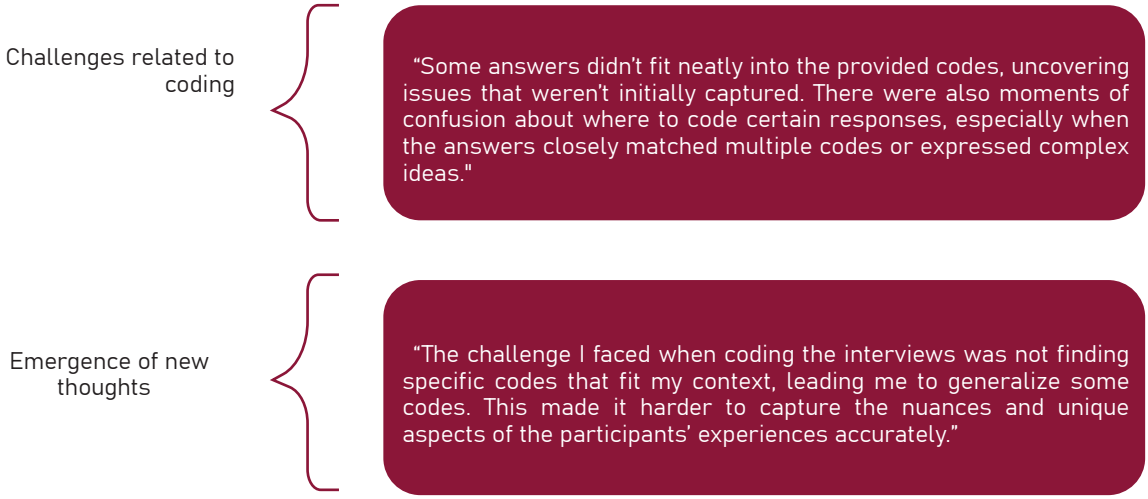
process while coding. Codes enable oversight of all statements from all interview participants on a specific topic.

For data analysis in larger research teams, deductive content analysis can facilitate the process. This implies drafting preliminary lists of codes before starting the coding exercise. Codes are then applied to the interview transcripts. The codebook is expanded while coding (Schneijderberg et al. 2026).

Collaborative data analysis in the GIRT project was assisted by the web-based software OpenQDA[23] for coding and analysis. OpenQDA was selected for its user-friendly interface, which simplifies the coding process, and its flexibility in data organisation. The software is particularly well-suited for managing complex data sets, offering a wide range of features that facilitate efficient coding and analysis. Accordingly, it ensures transparency and traceability throughout the coding and analysis process, making it a reliable tool for keeping the integrity and rigour of the research. However, data analysis tools can help to retrieve coded data, but selecting significant statements and attributing appropriate codes is not a task you can delegate to software. Qualitative analysis requires attention to variation, to differences in emphasis, and to shades of meaning.

The meaning of a code needs to be clear throughout the entire coding process. You can use memos to define codes, e.g. write down which topics are covered by a code, what this code stands for, and share these with your fellow researchers who are coding other interviews in the same research project. It is recommended to use general terms for codes and to avoid too many different codes. Researchers should establish a list of codes (a codebook) and add definitions and examples for each code. The aim is for all coding of all interviews to consistently use the same codes for similar topics. Coding as a process consists of carefully reading all transcripts and annotating them with the codes available in the codebooks. We recommend performing line-by-line coding of the various transcripts. Several codes can be applied to a sentence in a transcript. Researchers should check for any emergence of new codes and categories.

Researchers should consider the coding of interview transcripts as a learning process. In the beginning, it won't be smooth, and researchers should be prepared to allow enough time for data analysis. Please find here some experiences shared from the project GIRT on the coding exercise:



Double coding of each transcript can be carried out by two researchers to assess data quality and reflect on the validity and reliability of the findings. Working in a team can also facilitate the coding process. Meet your team members regularly to track any changes made to the processes, such as reviewing, defining, and labelling themes uncovered. Maintaining a focus on female perspectives entails giving space to inductively derived insights by developing codes from the bottom up. Discuss the themes produced within your research team to ensure that the data is complete.

When defining codes, stay close to the meanings your interview partners gave. Listen and read carefully what interview partners have said. An example used by Rubin and Rubin (2012: 202) makes this clear: In a study, researchers want to find out what makes marriages break up. They discover that men define marriage differently from women. While in this example, men emphasise responsibility and sexual intimacy, women highlight emotional support and communication. Using one single concept – marriage – to code such different meanings would not help explain the varying understandings. Instead, Rubin and Rubin suggest that the researchers could use four distinct codes, each focusing on a single significant aspect of marriage.

Learnings from the coding phase in the project GIRT can serve as advice for researchers. We therefore provide here some more details and suggestions for efficient coding. In the project GIRT, the preliminary code set was organized into a shared codebook and document control system, with assigned researchers and the status of coding for each interview, and codes were kept reasonably general (to avoid an unmanageable number of near-duplicates) and prepared for consistent use across transcripts.

To strengthen traceability between postprocessing and coding, interviews were handled with a consistent identification logic (visible in the transcript files), where a compact "code" label captures key metadata (e.g., institution and thematic area). For example, transcripts show identifiers such as "Interview_AAU_TS_13", which link the interview to a specific university/institution (AAU = Addis Ababa University) and thematic area (TS = tenure security), supporting later organisation and retrieval during analysis.

Ensuring coding consistency across researchers: Coding consistency is supported through a shared codebook, early alignment sessions, and routine checks during coding. A practical approach is to jointly code a small set of the same transcripts at the start, compare coded segments, discuss disagreements, and refine code definitions until the team similarly applies the codes. Throughout the process, double coding selected transcripts and discussing results in regular team meetings helps to reflect on validity and reliability, track changes to definitions, and ensure that coding remains comparable across researchers and sites.

Adding and documenting new codes during analysis: The preliminary list of codes should be enlarged, refined and adapted during coding. When a coder encounters relevant content that does not fit any existing code, the team should decide whether to add a new code (with a definition and example), create a new subcode under an existing parent code, or revise an existing definition so that it captures the meaning more precisely. To keep this process auditable, maintain a simple codebook change log (date, what changed, why, and who proposed/approved it). When a new code is added, revisit earlier transcripts (where feasible) to check whether this code is also present there, so that the analysis does not depend only on later interviews.

Qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) has become an essential tool for managing and analysing qualitative datasets. These tools help researchers organize transcripts, assign codes to text segments, write analytical memos, and identify thematic patterns. Among these tools, OpenQDA is an emerging open-source qualitative data analysis platform designed to facilitate collaborative

qualitative research.

OpenQDA[24] is a web-based software developed to support the coding and analysis of qualitative materials such as interview transcripts, documents, field notes, and multimedia content. The software provides functionalities that allow researchers to upload documents, develop coding systems, apply codes to textual segments, write memos, retrieve coded segments, and generate analytical reports. Because OpenQDA is open-source and web-based, it supports collaborative research environments where multiple researchers can work on the same dataset simultaneously. We have divided the steps to successfully code in OpenQDA, which are

1. Data Preparation Phase
2. Coding Using OpenQDA

8.8.1. Data Preparation Phase

The preparation phase has two important steps:

- **Data Creation:** Before the coding process begins, research materials must first be created and prepared. Common materials or data in qualitative research can be interview (transcripts), focus group interview (transcripts), field notes, policy documents, online discussions or forum posts or observational notes. For the GIRT project the team used interviews which were conducted in Ethiopian and Mozambican official or local languages, then transcribed and translated to English.

- **Data Preparation and Formatting:** Before importing data into OpenQDA, researchers must ensure that interview transcripts are properly formatted and organised. Each interview transcript should be saved as an individual document file. Common file formats supported by qualitative analysis software include txt, docx, pdf and rtf. During the data preparation and uploading stage, the GIRT team recommends saving the interview transcripts in rtf (rich text format) for best compatibility. It is recommended that each interview transcript includes clear participant identifiers, for example Interview_UoM_TS_01, Interview_UoM_TS_02, Interview_UoM_TS_03. The abbreviation UoM stands for the University of Mekelle, the abbreviation TS stands for the thematic area Tenure Security. Proper data organization helps ensure that documents can easily be retrieved and compared during the analysis phase.

8.8.2. Coding Using OpenQDA

OpenQDA is a qualitative data analysis platform designed to support systematic coding and interpretation of qualitative materials. It provides a digital workspace where researchers can manage large datasets and conduct coding procedures efficiently.

The key functionalities of OpenQDA include project creation and management, importing qualitative documents, creating and organizing code systems, coding textual segments, writing analytical memos, retrieving coded data and supporting collaborative research workflows. Unlike traditional manual coding methods, OpenQDA allows researchers to maintain a structured coding system and quickly retrieve coded segments, making the analysis process more efficient and transparent.

The following are the steps for successfully codding an interview in OpenQDA:

[24] https://openqda.org/

1. Creating a Project in OpenQDA

The first step in using OpenQDA is the creation of a new research project.

- Register or Log In
- Open the Dashboard

After accessing the OpenQDA platform, researchers log into the system and open the project dashboard. From the dashboard, researchers select the option to create a new project. During this stage, researchers provide basic information about the study, including the project title and a brief description of the research objectives.

For example, project title: GIRT Tenure Security. Project description: This is a part of the study scope of the GIRT project focusing on interviews conducted with regard to the thematic area of Tenure Security.

Creating a project establishes the workspace in which all documents, codes, and memos related to the study will be stored.

2. Importing Data into OpenQDA

Once the project has been created, the next step is to import qualitative data into the platform. Within the OpenQDA interface, researchers can upload documents through the document management section. Each transcript or document is uploaded individually and becomes part of the project dataset. Please find here the detailed steps:

- Go to “Data / Documents”
- Click “Upload File”
- Select transcript files
- Organize files into an interview folder, a focus group interview folder and a documents folder.

Organizing documents in this manner allows researchers to analyse responses across multiple participants.

3. Creating Codes in OpenQDA

In OpenQDA, codes are created within the code system interface. Researchers define each code and provide a description explaining its meaning. For example, the code named “Tenure Type” is described with the interview question “What is the tenure type the interviewee currently has (farmland, lease, rent, etc.)”?

Detailed steps are as follows:

- Open “Code System”
- Click “Create Code”
- Add name and description

Developing clear code descriptions is important because it ensures consistency during the coding process.

4. Coding the Data

In OpenQDA, coding is performed by highlighting a segment of text and assigning a code from the code system.

Please find here the detailed steps:

Select a document to code

- Open the document
- Highlight a section of the text in correspondence to the code or codes
- Right click on the highlighted text
- Select the appropriate code or codes
- Done

5. Writing Memos

Memos help track research ideas during coding. In OpenQDA, memos can be attached to codes, documents or specific text segments. An exemplary memo can read like this: "Several residents describe tenure security as a base for securing their economic and financial aspirations, suggesting livelihood is tied to tenure security".

Memos help researchers developing insights that later contribute to the interpretation of results.

Please find here the detailed steps to follow:

- Click "Add a memo"
- Select to which to attach a memo to (code, document or text segment)

6. Retrieving and Reviewing Coded Data

In OpenQDA, researchers can select a code and view all segments of text associated with that code across the dataset. For example, retrieving the code "Tenure Security Type" may display excerpts from multiple interview transcripts discussing tenure security types. By reviewing these segments together, researchers can identify patterns and similarities in participants' experiences.

8.9. Writing Up the Findings and Disseminating Results

The characteristics of an academic paper or research article are the logically coherent structure of the outline, the text and the footnoting and referencing system. A paper can be claimed academic when arguments and evidence are logically coherent, technical terms are used to describe and explain the phenomena and the communication is subject-specific (Hartley 2008).

The production of a research article usually follows a process that starts with an idea, the planning and conception phase until the realisation and completion of the work. The writing itself is a processual act in which writers enter into dialogue with their research materials and other authors' writings. Academic papers are usually not written in one go, but rather through the revision of drafts. These drafts are revised and restructured until the final work is complete. Reading, conceptualising, understanding, thinking and writing alternate and should be carried out repeatedly for individual sections of the paper (Murray and Moore 2006).

Academic papers, with their specific style, subject-specific language and rhetoric, also shape professional discourse and contribute to the advancement of knowledge and innovation. Scientific writing is not just a matter of putting down finished thoughts but consists of various interconnected sub-processes. It relates to one's own research and knowledge interests and involves critical thinking, questioning and evaluation of theory-based arguments and empirical evidence. Scientific writing is part of a process of understanding and gives scientific form to well-founded reasoning.

With the research questions in mind and once the interview transcripts have been coded, researchers can start writing up their findings. Before you start writing individual sections or chapters of an academic paper, it is advisable to create a preliminary table of contents. This requires that the research topic has been clearly defined, that the literature review has been completed, and that the interviews (and other empirical materials) have been analysed. The preliminary table of contents may change in the course of your work, but it constitutes the starting point for the further development of your research article. Mind mapping can be helpful when creating the table of contents. In any case, putting together a draft table of contents will support you in selecting and deciding on specific thematic focal points.

When writing an academic paper, the authors should start with the empirical part in answering the question: What do I need to know to understand the following? The authors should note down the answers according to the respective content focus and ensure that the sequence is coherent and explains the reasoning behind this sequence. The authors then should refer to the theoretical part of the research article and repeat this question-and-answer exercise.

Structured preparations make it easier to write up the analysis from the interviews. One of the most common forms is paraphrasing, in which the statements in the respective categories or thematic areas are first explained and then interpreted. When writing up the findings from your interviews, you can start with an introductory sentence, i.e. formulate your intention with reference to the research question or category. Note down your research interest and the objectives of your research. Then answer the research question by paraphrasing, that means rewriting what was said to convey the meaning of what was said, and by using dialogues. When using dialogues, let several interview partners talk to each other and use comparative expressions such as “similar to” or “in contrast to”. Combine original quotes with your own sentences. Finally, briefly summarise the main points of all interviews. Formulate partial results in relation to your research question, using your own sentences. Summarise statements with the same content and distinguish between diverging statements.

Be sure to check the original interviews rather than relying solely on your memory when writing the final version. “Accuracy requires you to choose quotations that represent fairly your conversational partners’ experiences and understanding; you must not just select quotations that support your ideas if your interviewees in general do not provide evidence that backs your argument” (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 65). The main aim of research is to understand phenomena and experiences and to explain the causes of phenomena. Writing up the findings through a gender lens might imply reviewing the conceptual framework used at the start of the research project. Terms and phrasing used by female research participants can significantly deviate from mainstream social theory. Going back and forth between academic concepts and descriptions of local female livelihoods is therefore needed to link these two framings of reality. “Presentation of contextual background material, such as demographics and study setting, is necessary if the reader is to be able to ascertain for which situations the findings might provide valid information” (Malterud 2001: 485f). Enrich the descriptions and explanations of phenomena through triangulation.

In the results’ section of an academic paper, authors are requested to make generalised comparisons, judge the strength of claims and highlight key findings from the interviews. In contrast to data, results summarize or explain what the data show. Discussion sections differ from results’ sections in that the discussion section explains why the results are meaningful in relation to previous, related work and the research question that was explored. Discussions need to be more than summaries. They should go beyond the results. Writers are requested to look at their findings and the study as a whole. Discussion sections can be expected to be more theoretical, abstract, general and concerned with implications and applications (Swales and Feak 2012).

Recommendations for the write-up of findings (Spradley 1979: 212 ff.) group the task into several steps:

- Select an audience: Writing can be considered a form of communication between writers and their audience. Researchers should therefore select their potential readers and keep them in mind when writing.
- Select a thesis: From your major themes discovered in your research, select a central message to share with your audience.
- Make a list of topics and create an outline: Select those materials relevant to your publication and structure them according to the sections of your publication.
- Write a rough draft of each section: Write as you talk to compose a rough draft of each section.
- Revise the outline and create subheadings: When the first rough draft is created, make a new outline and rearrange the sections as appropriate. You can add subheadings to better link one subsection with the next.
- Edit the rough draft: Improve the details of writing. Work through each section while keeping the entire publication in mind.
- Write the introduction and conclusion.
- Write the final draft: This includes proofreading, but, if necessary, also other final editorial changes.

Revising an academic paper by project team members, colleagues or peers can significantly improve coherence, comprehensibility and pertinence. Drafting and revising can help achieve clarity. Good writing emerges from the dialogue with academic discourse (Becker 2020).

Researchers should strive to disseminate results in a gender-sensitive way. In the case of the project GIRT, systemic gender disparities were not viewed as a top-priority problem by the community. This finding does not imply that inequality is absent; rather, it may reflect a normalisation of gender-based roles, limited awareness of their long-term economic impact, or an overriding focus on immediate material needs over less tangible, systemic concerns. By using frameworks such as gender-transformative change (Hillenbrand et al. 2015), researchers can contribute to changing individual and collective capacities, expectations, and negotiation dynamics embedded within relationships as well as within informal and formal institutional rules.

A gender-sensitive write-up could, for example, rely on the theoretical approach of "domains of everyday life" (Gilroy and Booth 1999). This framework focuses on physical, social, and emotional domains within which everyday life is conducted:

- Enjoyment: social interaction, socialising, religion, and cultural activity
- Home and neighbourhood: dwelling and its environment, facilities, and services
- Making ends meet: affordable daily life services and goods, income-generating opportunities/employment
- Sources of support: friends and family, social networks, voluntary and community groups
- Having a say: making choices, participation in decisions affecting the individual, household, and community.

9. Conclusions

This research manual is grounded in the understanding that knowledge generation is a continuous and evolving process, rather than one that leads to fixed conclusions. It is designed to support qualitative research on women living in slums and informal settlements by drawing on long-term experiences in teaching, supervision, and interdisciplinary research. The manual responds to recurring challenges faced by researchers and aims to strengthen the quality, rigour, and reflexivity of qualitative inquiry, while encouraging future researchers to contribute to ongoing methodological and theoretical development.

At its core, the manual emphasises the importance of clarity of perspective, including researchers' views on truth, sources of knowledge, and their own roles in the research process. In qualitative research, particularly in informal settlement contexts, theoretical positioning is less about replicating prior studies and more about how problems are framed, how evidence is generated, and how gaps in understanding women's lived experiences are addressed. While debates between positivist and constructivist traditions are acknowledged, the manual adopts a qualitative epistemological stance that values context, meaning, and temporality, recognising that realities in slums and informal settlements vary across space and time.

The manual underscores that well-defined research questions are the foundation of high-quality research. In studies involving women in informal settlements, research questions must be ethically sound, feasible, context-sensitive, and novel, as they directly shape the research design, data collection methods, and analytical strategies. Defining such questions requires careful reflection on why the question matters, whose knowledge it prioritises, and how it contributes to understanding women's everyday realities.

Qualitative research in slums and informal settlements depends on inductive reasoning, where meanings from participants' accounts serve as the foundation for interpretation and theory development. Participants are intentionally chosen based on their lived experiences and knowledge, focusing on depth rather than broad representativeness. Although qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalisation, the manual emphasises the importance of transferability, which is achieved through detailed descriptions of contexts, methods, processes and evidence.

The manual offers guidance on data collection, transcription, coding, analysis, and rigour, recognising these as complex and iterative processes. Data is gathered from various sources in natural settings, such as in-depth and key informant interviews. The analysis includes systematic transcription, coding, thematisation, and interpretation. Researchers are considered key instruments in the process and must maintain ongoing self-reflection to distinguish participants' meanings from their own interpretations. Keeping reflexive diaries, piloting tools, engaging in peer debriefing, member checking, triangulation, findings validation and detailed documentation are highlighted as vital practices to ensure trustworthiness.

Ethics is treated as a cross-cutting foundation of qualitative research rather than merely a procedural requirement. In research with women in slums and informal settlements, ethical practice extends beyond consent to include respect, reciprocity, careful relationship management, and recognition of participants as responsible knowledge holders. Finally, the manual stresses the need for rigorous planning and team coordination, including clear roles, community entry strategies, fieldwork logistics, reflexive practices, and validation processes, to support ethical, credible, and impactful research outcomes.

10. References and Further Reading

Arnfred, Signe (2010). "Feminism and Gendered Bodies: On Female Initiation Rituals in Northern Mozambique". In: Quaderns, 26 (2010), 61-82.

Arnfred, Signe and Meneses, Maria P. (2019). "Mozambican Capulanas: Tracing Histories and Memories". In: Khan, Sheila P.; Meneses, Maria P. and Bertelsen, Bjørn E. (eds.): Mozambique on the Move: Challenges and Reflections. Pp. 186-210. Leiden: Brill.

Ayata, Bilgin; Harders, Cilja; Özkaya, Derya and Wahba, Dina (2019). "Interviews as situated affective encounters: a relational and processual approach for empirical research on affect, emotion and politics". In: Kahl, Antje (ed.): Analyzing Affective Societies: Methods and Methodologies. Pp. 63-77. London & New York: Routledge.

Becker, Howard S. (2020). Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article. Third Edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Berger, Roni (2015). "Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research". In: Qualitative Research, 15(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1991). Language and symbolic power. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre et al. (2000). The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Braun, Virginia and Clarke, Victoria (2021). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Brett, Bethany M. and Wheeler, Katy (2022). How to do qualitative interviewing. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Brinkmann, Svend and Kvale, Steinar (2015). InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Burawoy, Michael (1998). "The Extended Case Method". In: Sociological Theory, 16(1), 4-33. https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00040.

Chilisa, Bagele (2020). Indigenous research methodologies (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Creswell, John W. and Poth, Cheryl N. (2024). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Connell, Raewyn (1987). Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Cornwall, Andrea (2016). "Women's Empowerment: What Works?" In: Journal of International Development 28 (2016), 342–359. **Online:** https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3210.

Corti, Louise; Van den Eynden, Veerle; Bishop, Libby and Woollard, Matthew (2019). Managing and Sharing Research Data: A Guide to Good Practice. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

De Amurane, Antonio M.; Fijamo, Dorival V.; Boaventura, Cecília J. and Mucufo, Jaibo R. (2023). House Conditions and Public Health: Case Study of Namutequeliua, an Informal Neighbourhood in the Municipality of Nampula, Mozambique. In: Trialog, 145/146, July 2023, 19-25. Online: https://www.trialog-journal.de/en/journals/trialog-145-146-the-housing-health-nexus-and-its-linkages-with-aspects-of-livelihood/.

Degefa, Hilina Berhanu and Getachew, Emebet (2022). "Why Ethiopia must close its political gender gap". In: Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 3 August 2022. Online: https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2022-08/why-ethiopia-must-close-its-political-gender-gap.

Dilger, Hansjörg; Pels, Peter and Sleeboom-Faulkner, Margaret (2018). "Guidelines for data management and scientific integrity in ethnography". In: Ethnography, 20(1), 3-7. https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138118819018.

Dotson, Kristie (2011). "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing". In: Hypatia, 26: 236-257. Online: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

Dwyer, Sonya C.; Buckle, Jennifer L. (2009). "The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research". In: International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8(1), 54–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105.

Finch, Janet (1984). "'It's great to have someone to talk to': The ethics and politics of interviewing women". In: Bell, Colin and Roberts, Helen (eds.) Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice. Pp. 70-87. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Flick, Uwe (2022). Doing Interview Research. The Essential How to Guide. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Flyvbjerg, Bent (2011). "Case study". In: Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S. (eds.). The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (4th ed.). Pp 301–316. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Gilroy, Rose and Booth, Chris (1999). "Building an infrastructure for everyday lives". In: European Planning Studies, 7(3), 307–324. Online: https://doi.org/10.1080/09654319908720520.

Gubrium, Jaber F.; Holstein, James A.; Marvasti, Amir B. and McKinney, Karyn (2012). The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Habermann, Birgit; Misganaw, Bisrat; Peloschek, Florian; Dessalegn, Yigsaw and G/selassie, Yihenew (2013). Inter- and Transdisciplinary Research Methods in Rural Transformation: Case studies in Northern Ethiopia. Vienna: BOKU. Online: https://cea.uprrp.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Manual_Research_Methods_in_Rural_Transformation.pdf.

Hakim, Sheikh Serajul; Akter, Salma; Islam, Md Azharul and Rahman, Md Saydur (2025). "Housing infrastructure and women in care: COVID-19 experiences from urban informal settlements of Khulna, Bangladesh". In: Journal of Urban Management, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 81-104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jum.2024.09.006.

Hammersley, Martyn; Atkinson, Paul (2019). Ethnography: Principles in practice (4th ed.). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315146027.

Haraway, Donna (1988). "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective". In: Feminist Studies, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575-599. Online: https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

Harding, Sandra (2004). The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies. New York, London: Routledge.

Harding, Sandra (1988). Feminism and methodology: Social science issues. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hartley, James (2008). Academic Writing and Publishing: A Practical Handbook. New York, London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203927984.

Heron, John and Reason, Peter (1997). "A participatory inquiry paradigm". In: Qualitative Inquiry, 3(3), 274–294. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300302.

Hillenbrand, Emily; Karim, Nidal; Mohanraj, Pranati and Wu, Diana (2015). "Measuring gender-transformative change: A review of literature and promising practices". Working Paper. CARE USA. Online: https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12348/248.

Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). "Researcher Positionality--A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research--A New Researcher Guide". In: Shanlax International Journal of Education, 8(4), 1-10.

Huber, Elisabeth and Imeri, Sabine (2021). "Informed consent in ethnographic research: A common practice facing new challenges (preprint)". Qualiservice Working Papers 4-2021, Bremen. Online: http://dx.doi.org/10.26092/elib/1070.

King, Nigel; Horrocks, Christine and Brooks, Joanna (2019). Interviews in Qualitative Research (2nd edition). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Letherby, Gayle (2003). Feminist Research in Theory and Practice. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Lincoln, Yvonna S. and Guba, Egon G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Malterud, Kirsti (2001). "Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines". In: The Lancet, Volume 358, Issue 9280, Pages 483-488. Online: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(01)05627-6.

Meth, Paula (2017). "Informal housing, gender, crime and violence: The role of design in urban South Africa". In: The British Journal of Criminology, 57(2), 402–421. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azw040.

Millen, D. (1997). "Some Methodological and Epistemological Issues Raised by Doing Feminist Research on Non-Feminist Women". In: Sociological Research Online, 2(3), 114-128. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.1351.

Mirgissa, Kaba (2024). "Qualitative Research Methodology and Methods: Researcher's Guide". In: ZAIRAICHI. 2024-03, Supplementary 2, 7-220.

Moustakas, Clark (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Murray, Rowena and Moore, Sarah (2006). The Handbook of Academic Writing: A Fresh Approach. New York: Open University Press.

Nagel, Thomas (1986). The View from Nowhere. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

OECD, AfDB, UNOPS-Cities Alliance and UCLG Africa (2025). Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2025: Planning for Urban Expansion. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/2a47845c-en.

Repko, Allen and Szostak, Rick (2025). Interdisciplinary Research. Process and Theory. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Riessman, Catherine K. (2008). Narrative methods for the human sciences. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Ritchie, Jane; Lewis, Jane; Elam, Gilliam; Tennant, Rosalind and Rahim, Nilufer (2014). "Designing and Selecting Samples". In: Ritchie, Jane; Lewis, Jane; McNaughton Nicholls, Carol and Ormston, Rachel (eds.): Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers. Pp. 111-145. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Rubin, Herbert J. and Rubin, Irene S. (2012). Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Schneijderberg, Christian, Wieczorek, Oliver and Steinhardt, Isabel (2026). The Handbook of Qualitative and Quantitative Content Analysis: Introduction to Classical, Digital, AI-supported, and Automated Data Analysis (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003496397.

Spradley, James P. (1979). The Ethnographic Interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stake, Robert E. (1995). The art of case study research. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Swales, John M. and Feak, Christine (2012). Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills. 3rd Edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Temple, Bogusia; Young, Alys (2004). "Qualitative research and translation dilemmas". In: Qualitative Research, 4(2), 161–178. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794104044430.

Terkel, Studs (1974). Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do. New York: Pantheon Books.

Tisdell, Elizabeth J.; Merriam, Sharan B. and Stuckey-Peyrot, Heather L. (2025). Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation (5th edition). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Turok, Ivan and Borel-Saladin, Jackie (2016). "The theory and reality of urban slums: Pathways-out-of-poverty or cul-de-sacs?" In: Urban Studies, 55(4), 767-789. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098016671109.

UN-Habitat (2020). World cities report 2020: The value of sustainable urbanization. Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

Van Breda, John (2025). “Narrative Action Research (NAR) for Doing Transformative Transdisciplinary Research (TTDR)”. In: Jones, Emma and Davies, Rhiannon (eds.): SenseMaker®: Praxis Makes Perfect: Distributed Ethnography in Theory and Practice. Pp. 95-129. Colwyn Bay: The Cynefin Company.

Van Breda, John; Musango, Josephine and Brent, Alan (2014). “Undertaking individual transdisciplinary PhD research for sustainable development: Case studies from South Africa”. In: Sustainability in Higher Education, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 150-166.

Van Breda, John and Swilling, Mark (2018). “The guiding logics and principles for designing emergent transdisciplinary research processes: learning experiences and reflections from a transdisciplinary urban case study in Enkanini informal settlement, South Africa”. In: Sustainability Science, 14, 823–841 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0606-x.

Van Manen, Max (2016). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action-sensitive pedagogy (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Yin, Robert K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Annexe

Sample Interview Guide for the Project GIRT

The following is a practical example for a semi-structured interview guide for a research project titled: "Exploring Women's Experiences of Precarious Housing Conditions in Slum and Informal Settlements in Africa".

1. **Introduction and Consent**
   - Thank the participant for taking part in the study.
   - Explain the purpose of the interview: to understand women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies in relation to precarious housing conditions in Addis Ababa City.
   - Assure confidentiality and emphasize voluntary participation.
   - Obtain informed consent (verbal or written, as appropriate).

2. **Background Information: questions to contextualise the participant's situation**
   - Can you tell me a little about yourself (e.g. age, household composition, marital status, occupation)?
   - How long have you lived in this community/settlement?
   - Can you describe your housing situation (type of dwelling, ownership or rental, materials used)?

3. **Housing Conditions and Daily Living**
   - How would you describe the condition of your current housing?
   - What are the main challenges you face regarding your housing (e.g., overcrowding, leaks, sanitation, access to water, clean energy, and security)?
   - How do these housing conditions affect your daily life?
   - How do you manage or cope with these housing challenges?

4. **Safety, Security and Tenure**
   - Do you feel safe in your home and neighbourhood? Why or why not?
   - Have you or others in your community experienced threats of eviction or displacement?
   - How does the lack of secure tenure (e.g. ownership or rental agreements) affect your sense of stability or control?
   - How do women respond, collectively or individually, to threats of eviction or insecurity?

5. Gender Roles and Responsibilities

- How do housing conditions affect your roles and responsibilities as a woman (e.g., caregiving, household management)?
- In what ways are women's housing challenges different from men's in your community?
- Who usually makes decisions about housing matters in your household?
- Are women involved in community discussions or decisions related to housing or settlement development?

6. Health, Wellbeing and Livelihoods

- How have the housing and environmental conditions affected your health or the health of your family?
- Does the housing situation influence your ability to work or earn an income?
- How does your housing affect children's education, safety, or health?

7. Coping Strategies and Support Systems

- What kinds of support (formal or informal) do you receive to deal with housing-related problems?
- Are there community groups, NGOs or government programs that have helped improve housing conditions?
- What strategies have you personally used to improve your housing or living conditions?

8. Hopes, Aspirations and Recommendations

- What changes would you like to see in your housing situation or settlement?
- What kind of support do you think women in your community need to improve housing conditions?
- If you could speak to policymakers or community leaders, what would you tell them?

9. Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience living in this settlement?
- Thank the participant for their time and insights.