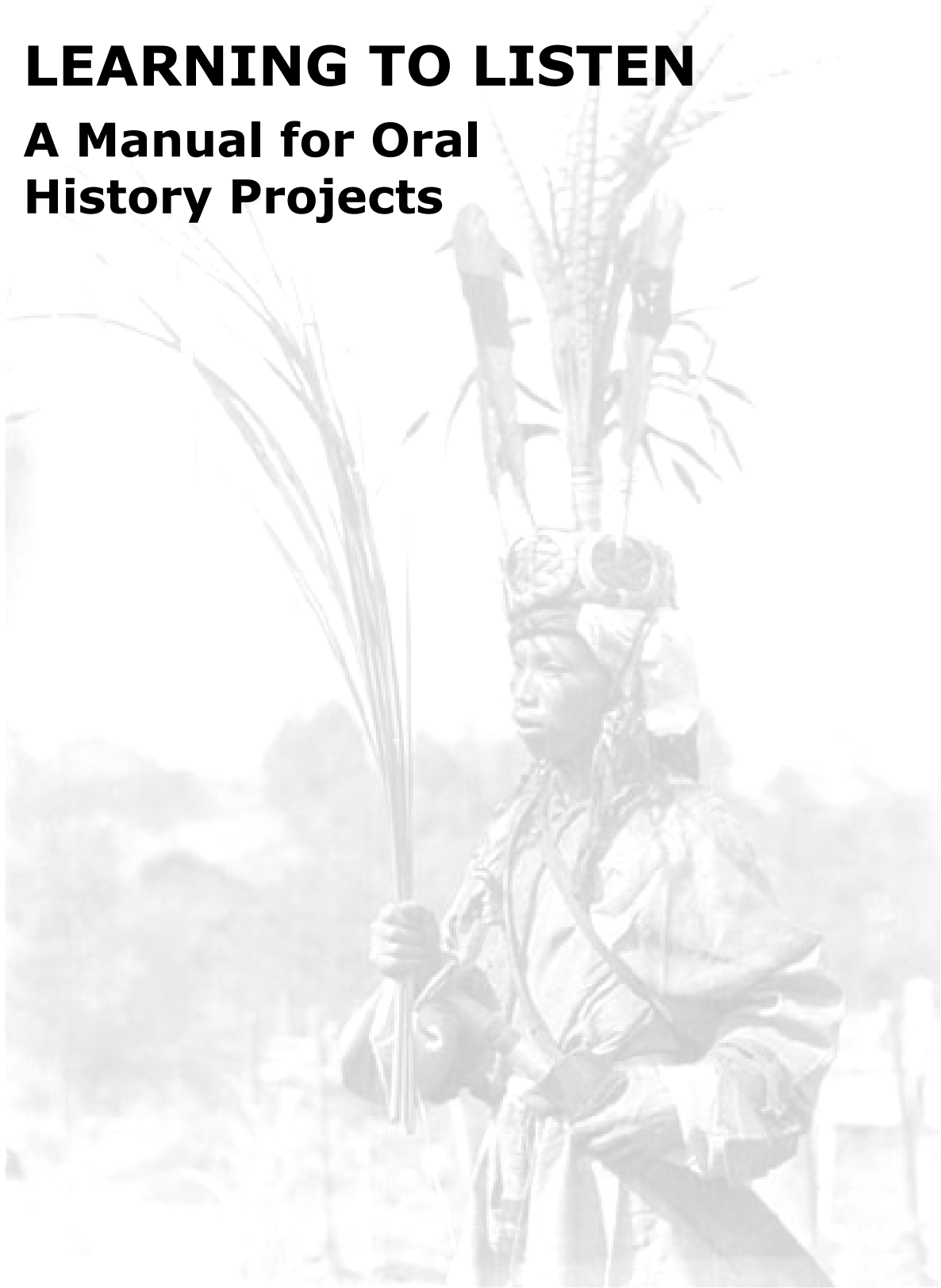


Learning to Listen : A Manual for Oral History Project



LEARNING TO LISTEN

A Manual for Oral History Projects





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0242 *Kachin dumsa in full regalia* [Title page]; 0032 *Cheriwangkawng Agyi kasha* [Part 1]; 0197 *Black Lisu man* [Part 2]; 1604 [Two Tai Ni Shan women] [Part 3]; 0129 *Shan Pagodas in Hkamti Long* [Part 4]; 0154 *Nung old man* [Part 5]; 0151 *Black Lisu pretty girl* [Part 6]; 0115 [Hkahku raft on Mali Hka] [Part 7]; 0068 *Kengtang jungle scene* [Appendix]

Learning to Listen - About the Manual

What is the manual about?

Learning to Listen is a manual to help you to develop projects using oral histories and oral traditions. The manual will explain what the terms 'oral history' and 'oral tradition' mean, how you can design a project, how you can train others to work with you, how you can try to raise money for your work, how you can develop the materials that you produce, as well as how to look after these materials and preserve them for future generations.

Who is the manual for?

The manual can be used by groups or individuals. It has been written particularly with people from Burma in mind, especially people from minority communities, and many examples relate directly to these groups. However, it is hoped that anyone who is interested in these kinds of issues will find something useful in the manual that they can apply to their own work.

How should we use the manual?

The manual is divided into many small sections. Read what is most relevant to you. If you are not interested in recording oral traditions, for example, you do not have to read those sections. You might need to refer to different parts of the manual at different times as your project develops. Do not feel that you have to read everything at once.

Some people will be working by themselves, some people will be working as part of a group. The purpose of the manual is to try to help you to develop a project that is appropriate to your specific needs, your resources and your community. Try to use the manual flexibly - use it to help you work out your own ideas. Don't try to follow it to the letter - it may not always be suitable for what you need to do in your particular situation.

What are 'Case Studies' and why have they been included?

The Case Studies are specific, detailed accounts of how a particular community or organisation has coped with an issue relating to an oral history project. These accounts should help you to consider similarities and differences between your own situation and those of the Case Study being described. Many of the Case Studies relate to work done by the Panos Institute's Oral Testimony Programme in co-operation with local community organisations in South America and Africa. The experiences they describe can be useful - from them you can learn about both positive and negative aspects of doing this kind of work in real situations.

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At certain places in this manual there are shaded, boxed sections titled '**Questions and Activities**'. These sections present a number of questions for you to think about, which it is hoped will help you to focus and clarify your thoughts about working with oral histories and/or oral traditions. Whether you are reading this manual by yourself or whether you are a project co-ordinator/trainer who is preparing for a training session, you may wonder where the **answers** to these boxed sections are. There are, in fact, no predetermined answers to these sections, no 'right' and 'wrong' which will apply to all oral history work in all cases - there will be as many answers as there are communities and projects. However, some simple guidelines have been given, particularly with trainers in mind. These guidelines are to be found at the back of the manual in the **Appendix**.

INTRODUCTION - WHY LISTEN?

What is Oral History?

- Oral History
- Questions & Activities: Oral History Subjects

Oral Tradition

- Questions & Activities: Oral Traditions

The Importance of Listening

- Questions & Activities: Oral History and development

Finding Solutions to Problems

- Problems 1-7

Oral History & Oral Tradition in Southeast Asia

- Contemporary world wide interest in Oral History and Oral Tradition
- Recent interest in Oral Tradition and Oral History in Southeast Asia
- The importance of oral tradition and oral research for minority ethnic groups in Southeast Asia
- Questions & Activities: Ethnic Histories

Case Study: The difference between written documents and oral history

WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?

What is Oral History?

The term 'Oral History' is sometimes used in a very general way, so first we should clarify what the term can mean.

Oral History

Strictly speaking, oral history usually refers to the spoken memories/reminiscences, hearsay/rumour or eyewitness accounts of events that occurred **during the lifetime** of the speaker. The speaker did not necessarily take part in the event he or she describes or interprets, but they can give an account of what they know about it, have heard about it, and their own and others' interpretations of and opinions about the subject. Historians, journalists and political and social scientists use this technique regularly because they feel it can give them information that is not to be found in conventional written documents, official records etc. Yet these oral accounts are always considered in the light of all other evidence about a subject - oral histories are always **cross-checked with other sources**, where that is possible. With regard to events for which no written sources are available or accessible (as with many events concerning the contemporary histories of Burma's communities), oral histories can provide valuable, and much needed insights - if they are used **carefully and critically**.

Life stories

Life stories are a form of oral history. They are the personal account of the life of one individual - this might be a narrative of their life or it might be an account of various incidents or significant events. The focus of the life story is the individual and their personal account of **themselves and their experiences**, whereas other 'oral history' research may concentrate on the accumulation of a number of accounts of particular events, rather than focus on a particular person.

Oral testimony

Oral testimony is also a form of oral history but the term is sometimes used to describe the application of oral history techniques to **contemporary social research**. For example, oral testimonies may be used to assist debates on development issues. The testimonies can provide information that is not otherwise accessible to policy and decision makers - we can learn about what people who are *not* the decision makers experience and think about their lives, and the effects of policy upon them.

Oral History, therefore, whether it is group or community history, biography or testimony, deals with the realm of lived experience, with interpretation and opinion within the lifetime of the speaker. When oral accounts have been transmitted by word of mouth beyond the present generation, they are usually called **Oral Traditions**.

Questions and Activities: Oral History Subjects*

see Section 8 for guideline notes on these boxed 'Q&A' sections

Make a list of what you think are the most important political, social, cultural and economic events in -

- ◆ Your lifetime
- ◆ The lifetime of surviving members of your parents' generation
- ◆ The lifetime of surviving members of your grandparents' generation

Since independence, what have been the most important events for -

- ◆ Your family
- ◆ Your home village in Burma
- ◆ For the community in which you now live
- ◆ The ethnic, religious, cultural or other community(ies) with which you identify yourself

How might oral history be useful in developing our understanding of these events?

Oral Tradition

The most important difference between 'oral history' and 'oral tradition' is that oral traditions have passed from mouth to mouth for **a period beyond the lifetime of the speaker**. Some have been handed down through many generations, but others are more recent. For example, if your grandfather tells you about the time the British came into his village to recruit soldiers, that is **oral history**. If you then tell your children about this event after your grandfather has died, the account becomes a family **oral tradition**.

There are many different kinds of oral communication that can be called oral tradition. Some of the traditions are passed on using everyday language that anyone can understand, but others must be communicated in a very formal way, even using a form of language that is not easily understood by everybody. Here are some examples of oral traditions:

- ◆ **Epics and narrative stories**
 - ◆ **Poetry**
 - ◆ **Songs**
- ◆ **Religious rituals**
 - ◆ **Myths**

Some traditions relate to a person, some to a group (a clan or family group, for example) and they always change over time - they are not fixed and static like a written document. Because of this, some people criticise the study of oral traditions because they say that what is said can never be tested or proved - you can never trace the 'original' form of a tradition, the 'first version' of a story, for example. However, when we consider such traditions carefully, it is possible to learn much about a community's history, or at least their understanding and interpretation of the past. In addition, we can learn much about the world view, philosophy, culture, social structure and institutions of a community - information, for example, of which any successful development projects should be aware. Oral tradition provides a pool of information about a community and its culture that is unavailable elsewhere - and without an understanding of which we cannot hope to understand that society now, or ensure that its future is well founded.

Questions and Activities: Oral Traditions

What oral traditions are important in your community for -

- ◆ Telling the history of your family, your clan, your ethnic group?

How did you hear these traditions?

- ◆ Who told them to you and when? Is that person still alive?

Have your children or grandchildren heard these traditions?

- ◆ How did they hear them?
- ◆ Are any of them written down? Who wrote them down?

Does your community believe that these traditions are 'true'?

- ◆ Is that important?
- ◆ Are some considered true and others not?
- ◆ If everyone agrees that a certain tradition is 'not true', does that make it less important for your community and your culture?

What is (or was) the importance to your community of

- ◆ Songs? Dance and music, with or without words?
- ◆ Poems?
- ◆ Dreams?
- ◆ When were these different traditions performed?
- ◆ Who performed them? Are they performed today? Why/why not?
- ◆ How have these traditions changed in your lifetime?
- ◆ What do young people think about these traditions?
- ◆ How difficult is it for young people to understand these traditions?

What do you think is unique about your community's oral culture?

What aspects of your community's oral culture are similar to those of your neighbours and other groups that you know of?

- ◆ Have any of these other communities recorded or written down their oral traditions? Is that important?

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

Many organisations involved with Burma's various communities, especially those outside Burma on the borders with Thailand, feel that they do not have the time and resources to spare to devote to narrowly defined 'cultural' or 'historical' work, even though they acknowledge its importance to every community. Yet the techniques of oral history can be of immediate relevance to the development of appropriate policies and in decision-making; and in the process of recording, a lot of unexpected social, cultural and historical information can also be collected. A later section of this manual gives more detailed information about the use of this technique for development work, including some case studies of projects around the world. If this is your main concern, the passage below outlines the views of Hugo Slim of the Save the Children Fund (UK) and Paul Thompson, the Director of the National Life Story Collection at the University of Essex in the UK, on the value of oral research techniques to development work:¹

'Just as [oral history] helps to present a truer picture of the past by documenting the lives and feelings of all kinds of people otherwise hidden from history, so it can create a fuller understanding of the views and experience of the wide range of people too often excluded from the development debate. In addition, by allowing people to speak about any aspect of their lives, the oral history movement opened up ... hidden spheres of experience. Written documentation and official records always revealed more about the concerns of the political elite than those without political influence. ... Oral history offered new perspectives on many issues. It enabled people to examine welfare, for example, from the standpoint of those who receive it rather than those who give it out. It gave people the opportunity to talk about personal, social and cultural areas of experience. It revealed the connections between different spheres of activity, such as social and working life, and how for example, working practices can influence patterns of family life.'

Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson also cite the following important contributions that oral history projects can make to development debates:

¹ *Listening for a Change*, Slim H. & Thompson P., Panos, London, 1993, p.14

1. They encourage the idea of **community history** and, therefore, that **community development** must be responsive to the voice(s) of the whole community, not just those of elite groups within it
2. They encourage **co-operation** and **group work** by members of the community
3. They provide an opportunity for people to **learn new skills**, but also ensure that **traditional knowledge** is valued alongside the new
4. They help to develop **social** and **cultural connections** between generations
5. They enhance **confidence** and **self-esteem** amongst the groups who are being asked to speak
6. They have been useful in developing successful **literacy** and **education** programmes
7. They have prevented elderly members of the community from feeling **isolated** and **unvalued**

Questions and Activities: Oral History and Development

Can you think of any **local development policies** that have been introduced in your village or in your locality **that have NOT been successful**, or any policies that your organisation has tried to introduce that have not worked?

- ◆ Why did they not work?
- ◆ How would listening to people before, during and/or after have helped the decision makers to make better decisions?

What are the most important development issues in your community at the moment?

- ◆ Who will make the decisions? Who will they talk to?
- ◆ What could they learn from talking first to the people who will 'receive' the policy?
- ◆ Why does it **NOT** happen that they talk to people first?

FINDING SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

Although many groups involved with Burma's various communities acknowledge that such work is valuable, they may feel that the realities of their situation make it impossible presently for them to carry out. Whilst the difficulties they face are real and significant, it might be possible to find some ways round these problems. Below are some difficulties that are commonly cited in relation to this issue, and some suggestions. Some of these suggestions might be impracticable for you but, with some modification of the general ideas, it still might be possible for your group, or others in the community supported and encouraged by you, to find their own solutions to these problems.

Problem 1: We do not have anyone with experience of this kind of work

Experience is not essential - you can follow the guidelines of this manual as a starting point. There is nothing mysterious or complicated about this work, just ensure that some of the basic points about making and using the recordings are followed. *But* it is important that the person/people given the responsibility of setting up such a project is/are interested in the task - it can be boring to have to make a transcript of everything that is said, for example, but every stage must be done carefully for it to be of value.

Problem 2: We do not have enough people for all the important jobs that need to be done already. We cannot spare anyone to spend time on these kinds of activities.

The best solution is to find someone who has the time and is interested rather than nominating someone to do it. It can be a very fulfilling experience for elderly members of the community to be given the responsibility of developing these projects and to hand the work over to them. They are often the people who have most free time in the community and may themselves be part of the project as narrators/interviewees - yet they often lack self-esteem when they feel that their 'usefulness' to the community is passed over, or not respected. Involving elderly people in a project is a way of overcoming these problems.

Problem 3: We cannot get young people interested in this work - they can't see the importance of it in the modern world.

One way round this problem is to direct the work towards development issues [see *below*]. However, even if they are not initially interested in the recordings themselves, such projects can be used as training programmes for young people to help them develop technology skills - using video cameras, editing videos and audio cassettes, learning computer skills to input materials and for typing-up transcriptions etc., or developing web sites of oral histories and traditions in some cases. Try to involve young people in ways that enable them to learn new skills, skills in which they are interested, and in which they can see immediate relevance and value.

Problem 4: Our group/community doesn't have any money for this kind of work

You don't need a lot of money or expensive equipment to do this work. All that you need is: a tape recorder that you can record on, a tape, and a pen and paper to make a transcript or to record information about the tape. That's it. Anything else is extra - and is not essential. Having the people to do the job is your greatest asset - not expensive equipment. Advice is given in this manual about some equipment that may be useful - but that is just for reference if resources are available. In many places you will hear music played on a tape recorder, and many of these machines can also record sound - people simply have to be shown an alternative use for them. To raise funds it might be possible to create an Oral History Group, possibly from elders or business leaders within the community. All the members contribute a small amount of money to support the purchase of a few basic tape recorders for community *use* i.e.: not to be kept locked in a cupboard and to be inaccessible, as so often happens with such things .

Problem 5: We have nowhere to keep the materials and there is always the danger that such collections will be raided and destroyed.

If your group is based in Thailand, try not to isolate yourself from the very many useful, informed and impartial organisations, especially around Chiang Mai, which could help you with advice, storage, and even access to computer equipment. To find these groups you will have to refocus your attention to think about cultural and anthropological connections, rather than just political ones. It is a good idea to contact Chiang Mai University for well-informed, local advice as a starting point. ***All respectable institutions observe strict codes of practice concerning privacy and access to materials*** should they agree to look after your tapes etc. for you.

Inside Burma it is obviously more difficult to get this kind of advice, but there are sometimes more stable networks between members of a community, linking people in the States and Divisions with those who have moved to Rangoon and elsewhere. By maximising community connections, it may be possible to find someone who can assist with putting material on computer disc, for example. By asking different members of the community to do different tasks which are of interest to them, and which can also enable them to utilise new skills, a large number of people can become involved at relatively low cost on a project that has long term value.

Some basic tips on conservation of tapes, photographs and paper are given in this manual to help with the proper storage of these materials. If your group can get access to computer equipment, it is a very good idea to put as much material as possible on floppy disc or CD - if someone can type, they can input transcripts onto a computer, or else use the project to train someone; audio tapes, and even videos, can be transferred to CD relatively easily with professional/skilled advice if you have a contact in Rangoon. Zip Drives can store even more information, if you have access to them. It is easy to make multiple copies of all these kinds of discs, which can then be kept in different places. In this way, ***an entire archive can be stored in a small box***. Again, make use of your local networks to overcome this problem - and plan ahead.

Problem 6: We can't justify spending time on this work at the moment

This manual will hopefully give some ideas about the value of recording oral histories and oral traditions in the implementation of development programmes. It is still important that any materials recorded for these purposes are properly catalogued, referenced and archived, so your group will still have to consider ways of dealing with the material after it has been collected. Such work also has to be done seriously and not superficially, but greater justification may be given to the idea if it can be incorporated into the design of appropriate and realistic development programmes.

Problem 7: There is too much fear in our communities for people to agree to having their voices recorded

Of course, in Burma and on her borders there is great concern about speaking openly, and for anything that is said to be recorded. This applies as much to oral tradition and oral culture as it does to oral history and oral testimony in a situation where the assertion of a distinct cultural identity can be construed as political activity. There is also a general mistrust of the notion of 'interviewing' itself, fraught as it is with distressing political overtones related to interrogation and informing. There are no easy ways around these problems, but there are certain ways by which trust can be built. However, these concerns do mean that there is a responsibility to ensure that measures are taken to ensure the secure storage and protection of materials before the project takes place.

- ◆ Programmes should be introduced through consultation and with the co-operation of the local community
- ◆ Interviewers must be trained to be appropriately sensitive [*see later in this manual*]
- ◆ The programme must not be opportunistic and should take a longer-term view so that recording can be on-going and as non-intrusive as possible. Although oral histories can be very powerful as a means of presenting human rights issues and for fundraising, for example, if they are collected only with these purposes in mind it can lead to the person who has spoken being represented by others in ways with which they do not feel comfortable
- ◆ The ethical aspects of such a programme need to be fully considered beforehand so that adequate measures can be put in place to ensure that sources are protected, but also that the material retains long term worth by being adequately annotated, catalogued and stored.

ORAL HISTORY AND ORAL TRADITION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

In many African societies, as in many societies in Southeast Asia, oral tradition was, and is, seen as important in its own right. Many African societies **continue to value** their oral culture - they do not consider it to be 'primitive' because it is 'pre-literate' - indeed it is not a sign of a pre-literate culture at all in many cases: orality is simply another aspect of these complex societies in which the spoken and the written word each have a respected place. Indeed, in recent years many societies have started to reassess their traditional oral cultures, to value them in new ways, considering them to be essential components of their community's past, its present and its future. Unfortunately, many of Burma's communities today hold a different view of the value of their oral traditions and, by association, of the spoken word as a record of recent events.

In many of Burma's minority communities the reasons for this can probably be traced to the influence of Christian missionaries, who associated 'illiteracy' with 'immorality', and these attitudes still have a powerful influence among many of Burma's Christian communities. However, this is not the only reason why oral culture lacks esteem. Sometimes a community's oral culture was compared negatively with the literate traditions of their neighbours - the Burmans, the Shan and the Mon, for example - forgetting that these communities, too, had very significant customs of oral history and oral tradition. Literacy did not mean that written history, for example, was free of myth, as we know from the Burmese *Glass Palace Chronicle*. Negative associations with oral culture continue to prevail in many of Burma's communities for a variety of social, political, religious, cultural and historical reasons.

Yet involvement in such work can be part of a much more global interest in recording oral histories and oral traditions. Even if such work in your community seems to be carried out in a situation of isolation, and if you find it difficult to persuade others to take your interest seriously, be assured that the ideas and principles behind it are well-founded, and that they have wide-ranging support - including the active encouragement of ASEAN.

Contemporary world wide interest in oral history and oral tradition

The **Second World War** was probably the most significant turning point for contemporary interest in oral history as a 'serious' subject worthy of study. In European countries and North America, politicians had to be more responsive to the opinions of ordinary people, which raised the status of oral history. In the countries colonised by the European powers, there was often renewed interest in local oral traditions and oral histories as part of independence struggles - nationalists sought to reinstate their own modes of historical, political, national and cultural thought in the definitions of what their newly independent countries should be. The common aspect of these developments was the arrival, or aspiration towards, more democratic societies, in which participation was considered a defining element - in which voices should be heard and responded to.

Another important reason for recent interest in oral history and oral tradition has been the spread of **telecommunications**. The written word is no longer the principle source for historians and social scientists - television, radio and all other forms of spoken and visual communication are equally as powerful and relevant. Some theorists even believe that the development of computer technology and 'hypertext' on the internet heralds a new age, which they term 'secondary orality' - it is 'post-literate' in the sense that the values we attach to conventional written sources are no

longer valid. According to this view, computer generated documents are increasingly likely to be the main form of written communication in the future. These are not fixed and static: we do not always know who created them, how the document has been changed, where it has come from; furthermore, we can interact with the document ourselves and change it. The standards of proof that were previously assumed the prerogative of the written word are becoming ever less certain. According to these ideas, computer information bears more similarities with oral communication than that of conventional written documentation. This means that we should seek to understand the ways in which oral communication is transmitted, to appreciate its strengths and weaknesses as a source of information. Of course, the vast majority of the world's population does not have access to computers - including most of Burma's communities. But these developments are relevant to debates on oral history because they have led to increasing value being attached to the study of oral communication of all kinds.

Recent interest in oral tradition and oral history in Southeast Asia

Regional interest in the study and collection of oral histories and oral traditions can be seen in the following developments:²

1. 1973 - University of Malaya hosted a seminar on oral traditions
2. 1973 - Regional seminar on oral traditions, Kuching, Sarawak
3. 1978 - first Colloquium on Oral History, Penang
4. 1990 - Southeast Asian Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (SARBICA) hold meeting on oral history
5. 1991 - ASEAN Colloquium on Oral History, Kuala Lumpur
6. 1992 - ASEAN Colloquium 'Recording our ASEAN Heritage'

A lot of work on orality in Southeast Asia is concerned with creating an archive of material that will provide a resource for the future. As far as the study of a particular period or event of regional significance is concerned, most attention has been given to recording experiences under Japanese occupation in the Second World War, and to 'élite' interviewing (politicians, businessmen, community leaders) in the effort to document recent economic and political history, especially in the first years of ASEAN.

Regular conferences are held and a variety of oral history manuals and journals are published in Southeast Asia. If you have access to any of these organisations, it is possible to locate your work within a much wider community, which can offer support and advice to those with less experience. These organisations are also familiar with the particular problems and issues that exist in the region with regard to such work. As stated, Chiang Mai University can help with issues of training etc. and it is a good idea to establish links rather than feel that you are isolated in what you are doing. Although the oral culture of your community will be unique in many respects, it will also have similarities with that of other communities in the region, from whom or about which you may learn some useful information to help you develop your own work.

² 'A Global Perspective of Oral History in Southeast Asia', Morrison J. H, in *Oral History in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, 1998, pp.8-9

The importance of oral tradition and oral research for minority ethnic groups in Southeast Asia

The following comments from James Morrison, Professor of History and Chair of Asian Studies at St Mary's University in Canada, give some idea about why this work is particularly important for minority ethnic groups in Southeast Asia.³ Read the text and then consider the questions that follow:

*'Until recently, historians were loath to accept that which was not documented - that is to say, 'no documents, no history' Not to recognise [oral sources] is to shut and bar the door on the vast majority of the world's population - the undocumented and undifferentiated masses of people who are born, live and die an unrecorded existence. The history of the colonised, of the powerless, of labour, of women, of ethnic minorities, and of children had rarely appeared in documents. With the growth of oral research ... the inarticulate have been given a voice. ... It is plain ... that oral research has a broad role to play in many areas of contemporary and pre-contemporary Southeast Asian history ... The use of [oral history] is various. It can be for individual, community or national purposes. For Southeast Asian countries, some of which have been independent for fifty years or less, national history is still paramount. Yet each nation, each region or ethnic group has its own collective historical experience and because of the differentiation of accounts, 'national history' is indeed a collection of collective experiences. **The unitary national history that is the goal of many nation states must in all cases in Southeast Asia be a history of multi-ethnic population with differing perceptions of itself, its goals and its aspirations. Integral to [this] is the use of oral tradition and oral history.'***

³ *ibid.*, pp.1-9

Questions and Activities: Ethnic Histories

How many different ethnic groups do you know of in Southeast Asia?

- ◆ In what ways do they have different histories?

How many ethnic communities live in the area you are living in now or in your state in Burma?

- ◆ In what ways do you share common histories and in what ways are your histories different?
- ◆ Do you know of any differences in the traditional ways that history is talked about or presented in these different communities?

In what ways is it important to your community that your history is part of a 'national' history of Burma?

- ◆ How would you write about your community's history in relation to the history of the state or the nation? How would you like to be presented?

How do you think the history of your community is different to those of the other groups who are your neighbours?

- ◆ Does your community have any written documents of its history?
- ◆ Who wrote the documents? When were they written?
- ◆ What do you consider to be 'good' about these documents and what is 'bad' about them?
- ◆ Do the other communities who are your neighbours have written sources for their history?
- ◆ If yes, does that make their history more important than your community's history?
- ◆ Are their written sources more accurate than your community's oral record, is their history more 'true'?

Case Study: The difference between written documents and oral history

It was stated earlier that 'conventional' written documents are different in nature to those produced on a computer or by oral accounts. One of the most important differences is that if we have different versions of a written document, we may **know how a document has changed over time**. Consider the examples below to help you to understand this difference.

Sometimes it is possible to trace the development of a written document by comparing its different versions. For example, below we can see how a speech that the Governor Sir Harcourt Butler gave in 1925 at a large *durbar manau* in Maingkwang, near the Hukawng Valley, was first drafted and then changed before finally being presented. These documents are to be found in the **India Office Collection** held at the **British Library** in London. The British administration at this time were anxious to end the practice of slavery amongst the Kachin (Jinghpaw) and head-hunting and human sacrifice amongst the Naga peoples. The first document shows this concern:

Despatch from His Majesty's Secretary of State for India, Public No.11, dated 21st February, 1924 [Mss Eur F/116/ 82]

The statement in chapter XVIII of the Report of the North East Frontier for the year ended the 30th June 1923, that in a comparatively small area of the unadministered Naga Hills the practice of human sacrifice flourishes to a 'horrible extent' gives rise to grave concern, and has led again to consideration in my Council of the letter of your Secretary in the Foreign and Political Department, No 919/505X, dated 19th July last, in which it was explained that your Excellency's Government were not at present prepared to contemplate the course of direct administration of the tracts where this practice prevails, as affording in default of their permeation by Christianity, the only definite and final solution of the problem. You evidently, however, share my view that it is discreditable that such a state of things should exist within so short a reach of British influence, if by any reasonable means in our power its prevention can be secured. I have no precise information as to the practical possibility of extending to these tracts in the near future such a measure of administration as would suffice to put an end to the practice in question, or as to the expenditure which this would impose on Indian revenues, but I would urge you to reconsider the matter fully from all points of view, having regard to the importance of the end so greatly to be desired, and to acquaint me with your opinion at a very early date.

It was later decided that the Governor should hold a large *durbar* at the edge of the Hukawng Valley, at the place where British administration officially ended. It would be a good opportunity, it was felt, to gather together many local chiefs and headmen who could hopefully be persuaded to change their traditional customs with this show of British authority. The Governor had to get the approval of the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India for the speech he was to give:

Letter No.366-B.22, dated the 9th December 1924 from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma to the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department [Mss Eur F/116/ 82]

Please refer to the correspondence ending with your telegram No 505X, dated the 13th August about the visit of His Excellency the Governor of the Hukawng Valley. I am desirous to enclose a rough skeleton draft of the speech which His Excellency proposes to deliver to the Naga and Kachin chiefs. Local subjects of interest may be added hereafter but Sir Harcourt Butler proposes to deliver paragraph 2 of this draft as it stands unless the Government of India desire that it should be altered in any way. I am to ask that I may be favoured with telegraphic orders on the draft.

Draft speech to the people of the Hukawng Valley on the 27th January 1925

After compliments.

I have come here to see you in your own country in order to assure you of the continued interest which the great British Government takes in your welfare. You are not under the direct administration of the great British Government but that Government is responsible for you. I have heard that bad men who want to make trouble have been amongst you saying that the British Government is weak and is going to leave Burma. Do not believe these rumours. They are both wicked and silly. The great British Government will exercise all its powers to maintain order to protect peaceful citizens and to govern the country.

As you know, there is a practice which is not allowed in the British Empire, namely the practice of human sacrifice. This practice still exists amongst the Nagas. Some of these are under your over-lordship and I have come here to say that this practice, of which you disapprove and which is a cruel and evil practice, must be discontinued. It cannot be allowed under any conditions. This must be clearly understood. The officers of the Government will have instruction to come from time to time to see that these orders of the great British Government are carried out.

I am glad to have had this opportunity of meeting you and listening to your wishes. I am anxious to help you as far as this is possible, provided you remain loyal to the British Government and carry out its orders. I wish you all prosperity.

The Government of India wanted to make some changes to the speech:

Telegram from Foreign, Delhi, dated 19th December 1924[Mss Eur F/116/ 82]

D.O. 505X. Your demi-official letter 366B.22. Draft approved. Perhaps His Excellency would consider inclusion some reference slavery.

The Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, Mr Lewisohn, made the following reply on 27.12.24 [Mss Eur F/116/ 82]:

The Government of India's suggestion that some mention of slavery should be made is in accordance with H.E.'s original intention. I have marked some passages on page 8 *et seq* of this file which deal with this question of slavery. If ever we take over the administration of the country we shall have to liquidate the slave question as we have done in Putao by a system of advances. So long, however, as we have no intention of administering the country, if we take up too strong a line in the matter of slavery we risk putting the backs of the chiefs up against us. I suggest that it will not be politic to say more than something like the following:-

'Another custom of yours which the British Government cannot tolerate is the kidnapping of persons from the Myitkyina District for sale as slaves in the Hukawng Valley. The practice of slavery is, I hear, dying out and is being superseded by the employment of servants, paid either in cash or in kind. Slavery is a condition which all civilised governments and peoples abhor. It is necessary to treat your servants kindly, whether their condition approximates more closely to slavery or to domestic service. Family life must be preserved whether a man be a slave or servant. Should any slave run away into Burma he becomes at once a free man and the British government will not allow him to be taken back across the border.'

The Governor Sir Harcourt Butler then revised the speech with the assistance of Colonel Rich who was somewhat familiar with the Hukawng Valley region and the customs of the Jinghpaw people who lived there. The revised speech was telegraphed to the Government of India and on 2nd January 1925, approval for the revised speech was given. The speech that was eventually made went as follows:

Speech delivered by His Excellency Sir Harcourt Butler, GCIE, KCSI, Governor of Burma at Maingkwan, Hukawng Valley on January 27th 1925[Mss Eur F/116/ 82]

I thank you for your warm reception and I trust that you have enjoyed the *manao* to which I have bidden you. The great British Government is deeply interested in your welfare and in the maintenance of peace and security and the absence of oppression of any class by any other.

I have come to discuss with you two main questions - the abolition of slavery and the prevention of human sacrifice.

As regards the abolition of slavery in the Hukawng Valley I have told you that it can no longer be allowed, that you will be given a price for your slaves which will be fixed by a British Officer who will shortly visit you, which will be paid to the masters of the slaves by him and recovered from the slaves when they have been freed by easy instalments spread over a certain number of years. The arrangements in connection with this purchase will probably take some time but will be carried out as soon as possible, and after three years or the 1st January 1928 no further slavery will be tolerated in the Hukawng Valley. From today onwards there must be no sale of slaves, or gift of slaves as part of dowries in marriage, in settlement of feuds or otherwise, nor must families of slaves be broken up. The Government has no desire to see the slaves leave the valley and no inducement will be offered to them to so do. If they escape from the valley they will not be returned. That is the prevailing rule. Once the price for the slaves has been paid they will become free men both they and their descendants forever and will be exactly in the same position as other free men in the valley. They will cultivate their own land, enjoy the wages that they may earn and hold property like other free men. Your chiefs have accepted these terms and I look to you to carry them out faithfully. They are to the advantage of all concerned.

As regards human sacrifice, this is practised only by a section of the Nagas, some of whom are under the overlordship of some of you Kachins. I look to you overlords to assist the British Government in the suppression of this abominable practice by giving information and helping in other ways in your power. You have agreed to prevent any one from the Hukawng Valley being sold or sent or taken for sacrifice. But this is not enough. The British Government cannot tolerate human sacrifice in any form and will take all measures necessary to enforce its will. Let there be no mistake about this.

A British Officer will visit the Hukawng Valley and the land of the Nagas from time to time in order to see that the decision of the British Government is carried out. You will find him a friend to whom you can refer for advice and help. The Shans tell me that they are molested by the Kachins. This molestation, as far as it exists, must cease.

It is the practice of the British Government to reward those who serve it and to punish those who work against it. I hope and believe they you will work well for it. I hope also that some of the chiefs among you, who have deserved well of the British Government, will visit Rangoon next cold weather as the guests of that Government. I shall be glad to welcome you there. Although the two decisions which I have communicated to you and which are unalterable may be unpalatable to you, I assure you that the British Government feels kindly towards you and desires your prosperity.

I shall carry away with me agreeable recollections of my meeting with you.

There are many things that we can learn from these documents, but for the moment it is important to consider how the speech changed and how we can follow these changes through the correspondence that was recorded. The final speech was revised in some important ways. For example, no mention was made of the rumours of the decline of British power. ***Why do you think this sentence would have been removed from the speech?*** We can see in the correspondence how, initially, there seemed to be much greater concern about the issue of head-hunting and human sacrifice amongst the Naga peoples than there was about slavery amongst the Jinghpaw. Mr Lewisohn seems to imply that the abolition of slavery was more a 'local subject of interest'. There were political reasons for this emphasis - and not all were prompted by local concerns. If we read the newspaper reports of the speech that were printed in England at the time, it is clear that most of them expressed more interest in the issue of head-hunting and human sacrifice than that of slave release. The British public found tales of 'head-hunting' to be more dramatic, they lived up to their stereotypes of what life was like in 'remote' parts of the Empire - and they were more impressed by these stories, which were given headlines such as: 'In Barbarian Burma' by the Birmingham Evening Despatch, 20th Oct 1925, and 'In wildest Burma - Human Sacrifices - Among the Head Hunters' in the Daily Telegraph on 20th Oct 1925. The durbar and the speech, therefore, were intended to be used for publicity and propaganda 'back home', as well as to impress a local audience.

All of these important insights into Government policy are made possible because we can see a chronology in the creation of this speech as it was being prepared for public presentation to a variety of audiences. Today, however, we might not gain such insights. Discussion of content might take place over the telephone or via email, and a speech on a computer could be rewritten without any record being left of the original draft at all.

Pt 2 - LISTENING TO HISTORY

History and Oral History

- Using historical sources
- Examples from Burma

•Primary Sources

- An example from Burma

•Secondary Sources

- Questions & Activities: Historical Sources

Points to Consider When Using Oral Sources

- Language and ethnic identity
- Questions & Activities: You and your language
- Listening and speaking
- Self-presentation and memory
- Ethical issues

History and Oral Tradition

- Oral tradition as process
- Oral tradition as performance
- Making a text from an oral performance
- The message

A Folk Song Can Be Transformed Into a National Anthem

A Case Study of an Oral Tradition From Burma

HISTORY & ORAL HISTORY

There are some people today, especially elders and community leaders from Burma's minority ethnic communities, who feel that an effort urgently needs to be made to write the histories of their particular groups. They fear, quite rightly, that when the present elder generation passes away, much information about the histories and cultures of their communities will disappear irretrievably. As conventional documents and sources relating to the histories of many of Burma's communities are few in number, many local history groups and committees know instinctively that oral history, and oral tradition, may be a useful way of supplementing these other sources, of filling in gaps, and of giving a local account of events that is otherwise undocumented. However, political pressures lead many to want to write what they hope will be the 'definitive' history of their community, to correct what they see as the inaccurate representations elsewhere - that the text produced will include everything that needs to be and can be written. However, not only is such an endeavour impossible, there is also the danger that any such work will lack credibility, that it will be condemned as just an act of political propaganda without long term value. At worst, such histories may even increase resentment and difficulties between and within communities - rather than being part of the 'solution', such history books can be part of the 'problem'.

The purpose of this section of the manual is to show how we can improve the quality of such a history book, how we can ensure credibility for what we write by being critical of our sources - and that this applies to all our sources, both written and oral.⁴ As most groups seek to combine written texts and oral sources in their projects, we shall first consider criticism of **written sources** - although many of the points made are valid for oral sources, too. Following this is some more specific advice relating to the use of **oral histories** in writing a history book. A later section will consider the contribution that **oral traditions** may make to such a project, and the specific concerns that influence whether our use of them is of a high critical standard.

⁴ There are a number of very useful internet sites relating to how to read and interpret historical documents. The notes here have been adapted from the site 'Using Historical Sources', North Park University History Dept., written by David Koeller, dkoeller@northpark.edu. The site has a number of useful links to other sites dealing with historical source materials.

Using Historical Sources

Historians usually divide sources into two main types:

Primary sources i.e.: first-hand sources

Secondary sources i.e.: second-hand sources

For example, if an accident happens, the account written down for the police by a witness who saw the event is a **primary source** because it comes from someone who was there at the time. If the story appears in the newspaper the next day, this report is a **secondary source** because the reporter is not an eyewitness and s/he is probably trying to interpret the event and to explain it using additional information as well as to describe it. The same distinction broadly holds true for oral sources, too. If a boy steals rice from a granary, the account of his friend who saw it happen is a 'primary' source, whilst the rumour that later passes around the village is 'secondary' - although oral sources may change in indeterminate ways as they are passed on. Yet, neither primary nor secondary *written* sources are 'complete' and 'true' in themselves. Even a primary written source is influenced by assumptions and outside information known to the writer. We therefore need to consider a number of points concerning any source that we use.

Examples of a primary and a secondary source from Burma

Consider the following examples of documents from the **India Office Collection** in the **British Library** in London. In 1925 the Governor Sir Harcourt Butler held a *darbar manau* in Maingkwan, near the Hukawng Valley in Burma [see *previous section*]. Below is an extract taken from a letter he wrote to his son, Victor, on the following day about the event:

IOR/Mss Eur/F116/83 [pp.95-97] *Extract from a letter written by Sir Harcourt Butler to his son Victor on 28th January 1925*

[3] 'I have left the Hukawng Valley. I have arranged to liberate the slaves on the hire purchase system. Government will pay the slave owners compensation and the money will be recovered by easy instalments from the slaves when freed. I had to do this without consulting the [Government of India]. They [should] be grateful. It is cheap.' ...

[5] 'The visit has been a success. The darbar was quite impressive. A thatch pavilion on either side of which were two elephants. Background of grass forest and distant hills. In front the people squatting with matchlocks and queer weapons. Between them a path down which I passed in full uniform, between lines of escort. A flare of bugles, elephants trumpeting. A few words from me in Kachin learnt for the occasion. Then my speech in Kachin and then I gave presents, guns DB [double-barrelled] and SB [single-barrelled], gongs, clothes etc. Free distribution of Burman cheroots at 5 pence a hundred, and matches much appreciated.'

[6] 'In the afternoon I attended their dances which were like other savage dances. Dull. Much wagging of derriere. I was glad to get away from the smell of buffalo blood, hot savages and stinking cheroots. Then fireworks. Never before seen. The same long drawn out cries of oh-h-h as at the Crystal Palace. There must be something primal about this.'

Compare this with the account of the event in the Rangoon Gazette, under the headline 'Kachins, Nagas and Chins - Governor's efforts to stop human sacrifices - Adventurous tour in Hukong Valley' [IOR: MssEr/F116/84, p.1, undated]:

'At the appointed signal the procession walked up, the Guard of Honour of the Military Police fired a salute, and, by an entirely unrehearsed effect, the elephants trumpeted in unison, a display that must have greatly impressed the crowd. ... The speech was listened to with great attention and interest, but naturally, considering the warnings it held out, excited no enthusiasm. ... By this time darkness had set in, and the next item on the programme was the fireworks display. This was a great success because fireworks were a new thing to most people. The fireworks consisted mostly of rockets. This a memorable day's proceedings were concluded.'

Quite clearly there are important differences both in **what** was said and **how** it was said. The Governor could say things privately to his son that he would never say if he had thought that it would become public. He could reveal to his son that he actually disliked all the noise and smells of the manau, that he found it boring, and that he was pleased with the policy of slave release that he had initiated, primarily because it was 'cheap' - a confession that would not be acceptable publicly. One of these sources was a private, family document, a primary source, the other was a secondary account - they present information about the same event in very different ways and we have to think about the nature of documents themselves if we are to appreciate what they mean for our understanding of the past.

Primary sources

When you read a primary source, you have to consider a lot of questions about the source to understand it and to appreciate its value and validity. For example:

1. Who wrote it? What do you know about the writer?
2. Where and when was it written?
3. Why was it written? What action does the writer hope to bring about by writing this document?
4. Who was the intended reader? What do you know about the intended reader? How widely was the document circulated?
5. What kind of document is it? How does the type of document it is affect what is written?
6. How typical is the document for the period and situation in which it was created?
7. What is the main point of the document? What is its argument or point of view? How is the argument presented? What evidence does the writer use to support his/her point of view?
8. What values (social, political, religious etc.) does the document reflect?
9. What problems does the source address and what do you know of this in relation to the broader historical situation at the time?
10. What problems, assumptions, arguments, ideas and values, if any, does it share with other sources from this period?

When we have considered the above questions we can start to understand the value of the source, to understand the context in which it was created, and then to consider what it contributes to our understanding of a subject. We then have to apply high standards in our own use of the document to ensure that we do not misrepresent it for our own purposes.

An example of a primary source from Burma

Consider the following example of a primary source from the **India Office Collection** in the **British Library** in London, and how it may be interpreted. This is probably the first document that was ever sent by a Jinghpaw (Singpho/Singhpo) chief to the British Government of India. It was sent in **April 1825** to Lieutenant Neufville (who led troops in the Sadiya area of Upper Assam during the First Anglo-Burmese war) by a representative of the Bisa *duwa*. The Bisa *duwa* later opposed British rule in the area and he is today considered a hero of local nationalist resistance in India.

Fort William Secret Department Consultations 20th May 1825, IOR:P/Ben/Sec/330:
Translation of a letter from [?] Grandson to Beecha declared, a Singphoh chieftain to Chundra Kantie Singh Rajah of Divine Origin:

Intelligence which has operated to spread your fame has reached me here that a Bengal Rajah called the Bura Sahib has accompanied you with a large land and naval force to upper Assam.

Therefore Beesa Batya styled Nuo Ratha make the present communication.

Heretofore Patawun on the part of your government of Assam assigned the tract of land comprizing Namroop to me by a written grant ratified by the interchange of mutual oaths.

In consequence thereof I left the village of Hoken and settled at this spot Nam Roop, my present abode.

I am willing either to remain here or proceed to Rungpore according as you may direct.

A requisition has reached the village of Beesa intimating that 2000 Burmese soldiers had arrived at the river Laklye.

You will favor me by sending an answer to the communication so that it may reach me in the course of ten days.

Despite the historic importance of this communication as the first known document from a Jinghpaw chief to a representative of the British Government, it is not necessarily the case today that the document has much appeal for either side of the political divide in Burma seeking to write and re-write history. Burmese nationalists might use the document to accuse the *duwa* of being weak, of playing into the hands of the British by giving them the opportunity to extend their influence in the region. Kachin nationalists might not wish to focus attention on the document for similar reasons, or because they may know of the rivalry between the Bisa *duwa* and other Jinghpaw chiefs that prompted this communication, undermining modern ideas of unity. Yet in both cases we would be interpreting the actions of this man according to our contemporary concerns. In reality we cannot say whether the *duwa* was 'nationalist' or not because our standards of reference did not apply to him at that time. Similarly, those Jinghpaw chiefs who fought with Maha Bandoola during the First Anglo-Burmese war, such as the Daifar *duwa*, cannot be Burmese nationalist

heroes in a modern sense - they were motivated by very different concerns to those of any nascent idea of a 'united' Burma.

So we must try to read primary sources with an awareness of their own context. During the 1930s, there continued to be disputes between Jinghpaw chiefs spanning the Assam-Burma 'border'. This led to a joint investigation by the British and the Court of Ava. Both sides were concerned about the potential of these disputes to escalate into war between the two countries - and also whether either side might intend to provoke such a conflict. From this investigation it became clear that the political manoeuvring by all the Jinghpaw chiefs at this time was prompted principally by the 'internal' politics and economic concerns of the Jinghpaw chiefs themselves and was to a great extent beyond the control of any other power [IOR:F/4/1582 - Political Consultation of 20th June 1836, pp.417-419]:

Memorandum forwarded by Captain Hannay to Captain Jenkins, the Agent on the North East Frontier, dated 28th March 1836

- [1.] In the time of Bundoolah leaving Assam he gave the chiefs Beesa Gam, Duffa Gam and Modee Gohain instructions that they were to remain friendly with each other and not to enter into any feud.
- [2.] On Bundoolah leaving Assam Beesa Gam on some plea requested Duffa Gam's assistance to go and fight the Modee and Bengmora Gohain, which the Duffa Gam refused to comply with for the reasons first mentioned on which commenced a quarrel and the Beesa Gam attacked the Duffa Gam and drove him from his paternal village, the Duffa Gam's wife being killed and himself nearly cut to pieces, which latter I am myself witness to.
- [3.] Some two or three years ago the [?Waket] Tong, a relative of the Duffa Gam was killed at the instigation of the Beesa Gam. So far it can be proved that he was killed by Laphaes called Rumrongmah, who to enable them to carry their orders into execution were supplied with rice in the village by a Rola merchant who refused to give it until [ordered] to do so by the Beesa Gam.
- [4.] The Duffa remained quiet until irritated by repeated taunts and threats of the Beesa Gam when he was resolved to revenge himself or die in the attempt. On this he ascertained the mind of the Komtie chiefs Latoo and Luttora Gam regarding his settling in Assam and finding they were [?] he sent the messenger to Lieutenant Charlton as already stated getting a favorable answer from all he would have [?awaited] a proper settlement had not the Beesa Gam sent him a threat, a message of defiance in the shape of a flint and steel.
- [5.] Here appears to be a regular case of Singpho feud where I have no doubt there are faults on both sides and as far as I can see this said feud has extended between the Beesa and the Duffa Gam, the latter being the most influential with the Eastern and Laphae Kakoos at the head of whom is the Panwah Soobah chief.

Although these local concerns were belittled by Captain Hannay (who led the investigation for the British government) as a 'regular Singpho feud', the various interests of the chiefs were actually being played out in politically complex ways. We can see that these Jinghpaw chiefs were more capable than we usually acknowledge of understanding the intricacies of trans-border politics in relation to the powers on the peripheries of their territories: the Bisa *duwa* styles himself with a non-Jinghpaw name, and the letter was written in an Indian language, not sent verbally by a messenger. He was acting according to the norms of other cultures revealing an appreciation of political frames of reference outside those of his own community. Furthermore, the *duwa* is fully aware of the implications of possessing a document which conveys legal rights to a particular and defined piece of territory - a concept of land ownership which is at odds with traditional Jinghpaw customs. The Bisa *duwa* successfully used this contact with the British during the First Anglo-Burmese war to obtain a position of pre-eminence amongst all the Jinghpaw chiefs of the region. This was a novel construct of authority sanctioned and created by the British administration, yet it arose largely because of the *duwa's* successful self-promotion and manipulation of this complex situation as he interpreted it. In this context, our immediate contemporary inclinations to interpret the actions of the *duwa* as that of 'western stooge' or 'nationalist hero' are crude in relation to the real complexity of the situation. If we resist the temptation to apply our own standards of reference, we learn much more about such documents and the circumstances surrounding their writing.

Secondary sources

People from many of Burma's minority ethnic communities who are interested in writing a history of their community find that the biggest problem that they face is that there are few, if any, primary sources available to them and they therefore have to rely mainly on secondary sources for text-based information. All the minority ethnic communities from Burma have a limited number of (usually very old) secondary sources which they consider to be key texts about their community - simply because there is a scarcity of other published material. For example, Jinghpaw people in Burma usually refer to *The Making of Burma* by Dorothy Woodman, published in 1962, and *The Kachins: Their Customs and Traditions* by Rev. Ola Hanson, published in 1913. Woodman was very interested in relations between Burma and China and the situation along the Burma-China border where, of course, many Jinghpaw/Kachin communities lived and about which she gives some information. Hanson spent a long time living and working among the Kachin people as a missionary.

However, because we feel that generally there is so little for us to read about the histories of most of Burma's communities, we are sometimes reluctant to question and criticise these works - for if we destroy the value of these works, with what are we left? But no single book can tell you everything about a subject - there can never be a definitive account of events, even if this has been the dream of many historians over the centuries. By its very nature, a secondary source is an interpretation of events - and there is *always* more than one interpretation of any event. Similarly, as stated, when we try to write our own secondary source, our own history book, we cannot claim that it is a definitive account - it can only be a contribution to a more general understanding of the event or the period concerned. However, there are three main ways that secondary sources can be very useful in helping us to understand, and write, history:

- ◆ *As a collection of facts* - **they can help us to find a particular piece of information quickly**
- ◆ *As a source of background material* - **you can get a lot of useful information on many different subjects**
- ◆ *As an interpretation* - **but the interpretation needs to be questioned and evaluated, as shown below**

Consider this extract from a **secondary source** detailing the involvement of Jinghpaw chiefs in the First Anglo-Burmese war, which was discussed previously. This extract is taken from *'History of the relations of the Government with the hill tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal'* by A. Mackenzie, published in Calcutta in 1884, p.63. It contains a summary of events, and also Mackenzie's interpretation of them:

The Singphos seem early to have conceived a respect for the British arms. Very shortly after the issue of the orders above described, they made advances to our local officers, and negotiations were entered upon with the view of inducing them to surrender their Assamese captives, and refrain from plundering the Sadiya villages. Enquiries were also instituted as to whether they would undertake to hold the passes of the Patkoi against the Burmese. The character of their tribal organization, not perhaps at that time fully understood, rendered the ultimate success of any such negotiations very uncertain. They were not ordinarily, or save for combined aggression, a united tribe, but an aggregation of independent petty cantons each under its own chief, and each jealous of the other, and quite ready to attack its neighbour, if need were or interest prompted. Hence it was almost impossible to deal with them as a whole, though it was by no means difficult to attach temporarily to our interests any individual chief who thought he saw some advantage to be gained therefrom.

Evaluating the interpretation of a secondary source

Clearly, the interpretation given by Mackenzie is only one possible way of looking at things. To appreciate more fully both the strengths and limitations of any secondary text we should consider the following points:

A. The Argument

- ❖ What historical problem is the author addressing?
- ❖ What is the thesis (the main idea)?
- ❖ How does the writer arrive at his thesis
 - ⇒ What type of book is it?
 - ⇒ What historical methods or techniques does the author use?
 - ⇒ What evidence is presented?
 - ⇒ What sources are used?

B. Evaluate The Argument

- ❖ Does the author present a convincing argument?
 - ⇒ Does the evidence support the thesis?
 - ⇒ Does the evidence in fact prove what the author claims it proves?
 - ⇒ Has the author made any errors of fact?
- ❖ Does the author use questionable methods or techniques?
- ❖ What questions remain unanswered?
- ❖ Is the author trying to justify a particular point of view?
 - ⇒ Does this interfere with the argument?
 - ⇒ Is there a 'hidden agenda'?

C. The work as a contribution to debate

- ❖ How does the book compare to others on the same or similar topics?
- ❖ How do other books differ in their points of view to this one?
- ❖ Why do their points of view differ?
 - ⇒ Do they use the same or different sources?
 - ⇒ Do they use these sources in the same way?
 - ⇒ Do they use the same methods or techniques?
 - ⇒ Do they begin from the same or similar points of view?
 - ⇒ Are these works directed at the same or similar audience?
- ❖ When were these works written?
- ❖ Do the authors have different backgrounds?
- ❖ Do the authors differ in their political, philosophical, ethical, cultural or religious background, beliefs and assumptions?

Even if we know very little about the writer, we can learn a lot simply by looking at the date that the book was published, by looking at the bibliography to learn what kind of materials the writer used to develop his/her argument, and by looking very closely at the way the writer deals with the information in question. For example, we know that Mackenzie was a Government official and that he was trying to write a text that was to be a summary of events in the region as a handbook for other officers. His intention was not to seek to understand the motivations and concerns of the communities he describes in any depth or with any particular empathy, but to convey the strengths and weaknesses of policy as initiated by the British administration so that it might influence the development of later policies.

Questions and Activities: Historical Sources

1. What is the difference between a **Primary Source** and a **Secondary Source**?
 - ◆ What are the strengths and weakness of both kinds of source material?
 - ◆ Give an example of a **primary source**
 - ◆ Give an example of a **secondary source**
2. What problems are there in using information from newspapers and textbooks?
3. How can we decide if a writer is a **reliable source**?
 - ◆ Is it important that a writer of a secondary source is **neutral**?
 - ◆ What do we mean when we say a writer is **biased**? What might be the **causes of bias**?
4. How can you know whether a writer has used a lot of primary sources ?
5. How can you know whether a writer has used a lot of sources in different languages?
 - ◆ What is the importance of points 4 & 5?
6. What kind of primary sources could you use to write the contemporary history of your community?
7. What kind of secondary sources could you use?
8. How might you use **oral sources** to supplement others that are available to you?

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING ORAL SOURCES

When using **oral sources** we must apply the same critical methods that we do to other sources - we need to think about the **reliability** of the speaker, their **beliefs** and **assumptions**, their **objectivity** and/or **neutrality**, and we need to test the reliability of what they say by considering **other sources**, too: books, other oral accounts etc. Oral sources must be cross-checked wherever possible, not necessarily to prove that the speaker is 'lying' or 'telling the truth' but because no individual can give a complete account of an event - only their partial view and understanding of it. If, after assessing what they have told us, we decide that what they are saying is generally reliable and credible then their words become useful in our efforts to understand, and maybe to write about the past. Oral history gives us one unique advantage, however. Unlike written sources, if we realise that we need to ask more questions at a later date to make the account more complete, it is often possible to do so.

However, it is important to bear in mind one important difference when assessing an oral source compared to a written one - when you are recording, interviewing or listening to an oral history, you yourself are actually **involved in creating the document**. You must, therefore, **consider your own role in relation to what is said, how it is said etc., and this must form part of your assessment and analysis of the source**.

Language and ethnic identity in Burma

Before considering some technical and ethical issues relating to oral sources, we should first bear in mind a very important issue relating to how the interviewer/recorder participates in the creation of an oral 'document' - that of the language in which the recording/interview is made. For many minority ethnic groups from Burma, the issue of language is very important in their presentation of ethnic identity, and the status of their language in relation to that of other, more dominant groups, can be a matter either of pride or of resentment. It is worthwhile, therefore, considering the possible implications of this for any project you may set up. For example, are there differences in the first language of the interviewer and interviewee? This is also an issue when a person from the dominant community of a particular ethnic grouping interviews someone from another group within that wider 'community' - it does not relate only to whether one chooses to use a community language instead of Burmese. The following questions are designed simply to focus your thoughts - they do not provide any answers to this difficult problem, which must be resolved case by case. It is an important issue not only in terms of recording/interviewing and narrating, but also in relation to the language in which any material may be transcribed and/or published.

Questions and Activities: You and Your Language

- ◆ How many languages can you speak? How many languages can you write?
- ◆ Which language can you speak most easily and which language can you write most easily? If the answer is different, why?
- ◆ Which is most important to you - being able to write a language well or to speak it well?
- ◆ Which language(s) did/do you speak at home?
- ◆ Do you know when and how the script of your community language was first written down?
- ◆ How many people in your community can speak AND read this language well? Can both old and young people speak and write it equally well? How important is it to young people to be able to read and speak your community language?
- ◆ Before your community's language was written down, was life very different for people? How has being able to write your language changed your community and its culture?

Listening and speaking

Any interview or recording process is not simply the act of one person. It also involves a relationship between the person interviewing/recording (whom I shall call *the listener*, although they rarely have just a passive role) and the person speaking. This relationship is very important as it can influence what is said. The following points may be significant:

- ❖ The **age** of the speaker and listener.
 - ⇒ In Southeast Asia, as in many other societies, there is still a strongly deferential attitude towards elders and this may inhibit both sides, either in what is said or in what questions are deemed appropriate
- ❖ The **sex** of the listener and speaker.

- ⇒ Women may feel uncomfortable being interviewed by a man, particularly in matters relating to women's roles, the family etc.
- ❖ The **social relationship** between the listener and speaker.
 - ⇒ Are they related in some way or does any social relationship or contact create a particular relationship between them in which one may be considered 'superior' to the other?
- ❖ The degree of **knowledge** that the listener has of the language and culture of the speaker.
 - ⇒ Is the listener capable of following what is said and asking appropriate questions, or will the speaker feel frustrated by the listener's lack of knowledge?
- ❖ What are the **religious backgrounds** of the listener and speaker?
 - ⇒ Is this likely to cause difficulties or misunderstandings, or do both make common assumptions? If so, what are they?
- ❖ What are the **ethnic backgrounds** of the listener and speaker?
 - ⇒ Are there any community issues, both past and present, that are likely to influence the roles and attitudes of either of them to the other?

As stated, ethnicity is a significant factor *within* groups, not just between them - especially as ethnicity in Burma has tended to be defined as a number of communities grouped together under one 'label' mainly for political reasons. Although some groups writing 'the history' of their 'community' assume that they share a broadly defined ethnic identity with those they are interviewing, they may also need to be mindful of the various subdivisions of that identity, especially if they are from one of the dominant groups. The following comments by Lai Ah Eng, an ethnic Chinese anthropologist from Malaysia, who conducted oral research into multi-ethnic housing estates in Singapore, are a good account of the problems and responsibilities inherent in interviewing when issues relating to ethnicity may influence what is being said:⁵

⁵ 'Some Experiences and Issues of Cross-Cultural Fieldwork', Lai Ah Eng, in *Oral History in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, 1998, p.112

Ethnic identification of both researcher and informants also unavoidably assumed the status of majority or minority member. Being seen as a member of the dominant Chinese majority group by non-Chinese informants required me to maintain an attitude of openness and objectivity and demonstrate an ability to face criticism of my own ethnic group without appearing defensive. Needless to say, knowledge of language and cultural codes of gaining access and conducting behaviour were absolutely essential in interacting with them. Cultural switching and politeness becomes valued not just for itself between equal individuals, but as a measure of sensitivity and respect accorded to each particular ethnic group and social interaction between groups. I was not able to plead ignorance; on the contrary, I was expected to show some knowledge of their cultural background and to discuss, express opinions and even to take stands on issues ... Furthermore, without necessarily having to agree with them, showing an ability to empathise without being patronising, condescending or insincere enhanced legitimacy and wins trust.

At the same time, my interaction with informants who perceive themselves as members of disadvantaged or discriminated minorities represented to them a rare but serious interest in their cultures and problems by a member of the dominant majority - a plus point where this interest is often perceived as lacking. ... That I was rejected not even once by an informant whose ethnic background differed from mine also attests to the possibility of overcoming ethnic boundaries to some extent and that power relations can be changed between researcher and informant despite their ethnic backgrounds. But such a confident stage of interaction can be arrived at only after much rapport building in personal one-to-one relations with informants. Generally, in a complex multi-ethnic context in which ethnicity is a significant factor, the researcher's demonstration of shared interests and sincerity in wanting to overcome ignorance of each other's cultures, to understand problems and to improve ethnic relations is the best approach to take.

Important to the success of any interview, therefore, is the training that is given to listeners beforehand, in conjunction with their innate sensitivity [see later in this manual for advice on training interviewers].

Self presentation and memory

Remembering/recalling and relating memories are not just mechanical acts, they are also creative processes that involve both **selection** and **interpretation** by the speaker. All of the issues below need to be considered in assessing the value of **what** is said and in understanding **how** something is explained:

- ❖ Memory is variable
 - ⇒ You need to consider the age of the speaker and what you know of their ability to recall events and people etc. Sometimes events can be 'telescoped' together as if they were one
- ❖ Memories are not necessarily ordered chronologically
 - ⇒ Often we do not remember things as a sequence of ordered events -recall may be triggered in surprising ways that are not necessarily obvious to the listener
- ❖ Some memories are 'discarded' and some memories are 'selected'
 - ⇒ Memory involves many conscious and unconscious processes that may affect both what is actually remembered as well as what the speaker decides to reveal of those memories

'While the focus of your project may not be pure history, some consideration of the role memory plays is worth taking into account when interviewing. People remember what they consider important (this may not be what the interviewer considers important). Memories are organised, selective and reconstructed. We regularly re-evaluate and redefine our past decisions and actions in light of where we are now. We retain or rework memories to help us make sense of the present, and we may repress painful and difficult memories. We mix together 'public' and 'private' memories, each influencing the other. Sometimes they cannot be reconciled, and one of the values of focusing on marginalised groups can be to give space to memories which have been suppressed by the 'public' dominant version of events.

Our memories are influenced by age (as people get older there is a tendency to reflect on and review one's life); by gender, social position and cultural background; by our life experiences and changes in social values and attitudes; by other people and by the interviewer. Try to distinguish whether narrators are relating first-hand experience or telling you what they have heard (from others, through the media, repeating popular myth). Is there any bias shaping what they are saying and is that important in the context of your project?

*Research has shown that we tend to remember places, events, activities, daily routines, people, feelings, sounds, smells and images better than dates, lists, statistics and other more factual information. However, where oral traditions are strong, people may prove to have extremely accurate memories for genealogical and chronological information, for example. **Whatever the situation, don't get frustrated if narrators get dates or statistics wrong. These are simple things to put right. Recognise memory for the valuable resource it is; it tells you how people interpret their life and the world around them.***⁶

We also need to consider carefully how the *intentions* of the speaker influence what is said. In this case our analysis can be similar in some respects to that which we use for written documents - although again, we must consider the part that we ourselves play in affecting what is said as we are the 'audience'.

⁶ *Giving Voice*, Panos, London, 1999, p.8

Ethical issues in relation to recording and using materials

Crediting sources

If we have taken an idea or an interpretation from someone else, or if we quote a primary or a secondary source, we need to state clearly the name of the author/writer, the date of publication/document, the publisher and title of the book, and the page number. This is so that people can check from where we have obtained information and can make their own judgements about it. Of course, it is not always advisable to credit sources in the present situation inside Burma and along the border. In this situation, anonymity should be respected, but it is a good idea to discuss with the person in what ways they would be prepared for their material to be used, and whether you can cite their name or not.

Intrusion and privacy

You also need to be aware of the possible negative impacts that such oral history projects can have on those involved with them. Sometimes asking questions about a cultural practice for example, can lead to it being undermined or questioned in a way that it never was before. Intrusion can also have a bad effect on people's personal lives by opening up painful memories or by focussing on the speaker's very private world. Privacy must be respected in cases where this kind of material is being uncovered. The interviewer must never put their own interests before those of the speaker, leading to discomfort or distress. If someone does not want to talk about a certain topic, this should be respected; if they do not want what they have to say recorded or written down, then do not do so. It is also important that when someone is discussing difficult or personal subjects that are being recorded that the interviewer is aware of the recording equipment, ensuring that tapes will not need to be turned over, for example, at critical points in such accounts, which can lead to a breakdown in the flow of what is said and can undermine the speaker's confidence.

Dissemination and transfer of recordings to other formats

The fact that most of Burma's communities cannot access copyright laws is relevant when considering how materials may be used, whether as tapes, written transcripts of tapes, on web sites, in books etc. It is important that the intended use of the materials is discussed fully beforehand with those giving information. It is also appropriate that people should be kept informed about how organisations wish to use materials beyond these initial intentions, especially if a request has been made by another individual/organisation to make use of them. **Furthermore, all such uses tend to alter the original in some way. Ideally, originals must be archived somewhere so that later formats of the material can be assessed in relation to the original 'document'.**

Ownership and authorship

'The issue of rights to privacy and rights over the material generated and collected is often made more difficult by the fact that many poor and/or rural communities lack knowledge about - or access to - any effective copyright or data protection legislation. In the absence of any obvious law on the subject, most ethical relationships between narrators and collectors have to be developed on the basis of trust.

Before agreements can be made about authorship and anonymity, the onus is on the interviewer to explain the purpose of the exercise and to discuss the end-use of the material, and ways of returning the testimony. Most people will be glad to be publicly identified with their testimony, but for others an element of anonymity may be vital. ... In other situations, understandings about anonymity and attribution are more than legal niceties. In communities where people are living amid conflict, fear or repression, setting such limits can mean the difference between freedom and imprisonment, or even life and death.

In situations where the details of the narrator/interviewer relationship are based on trust rather than defined by law, it is wise to find out what kind of local customs are binding in relation to the protection and respect of a person's word. It might be appropriate to agree to these and to treat them as the equivalent of copyright and protection. Otherwise, it might be best to devise the project's own quasi-legal procedures which protect the narrators and are also easily understood by them.⁷

⁷ *Listening For A Change*, Slim H. & Thompson P., Panos, London, 1993, pp.152-3

Informed Consent and Conditions of Use forms

Some projects make use of Consent or Conditions of Use forms. It may be that the communities with which you are working do not feel that these written documents are relevant, and they may even exacerbate distrust about the intentions of the project. Sometimes a verbal agreement is considered of more worth than such a document, but it is worth exploring whether there may be a case for using them. Certainly the principles expressed in using such a form need to be discussed and the issues raised by them resolved between speaker and listener before recording begins. Consent needs to be based on real information; and decisions made must be noted somewhere and respected so that others will also be aware of any restrictions on how material is to be used. It may be that it is best to adopt a global project standard that applies equally to all participants.

Should you or your group be seeking to deposit the materials you have collected in a foreign archive for safe-keeping, it is important that you insist on developing a Conditions of Use form with the institution concerned. Any reputable organisation/institution will not hesitate to agree and should already make use of them. Make sure that the form is suitable for *you* and not just for them. Particular care should be taken if any of the materials are handed over to an individual or institution engaged in commercial ventures (books, exhibitions etc.) with which you feel your archive might be incorporated. Clear boundaries of use, and feedback about continued use, need to be decided upon in all cases - however well meaning the intentions of the individual or the organisation. For this reason, an outline **Conditions of Use** form developed by the **Panos Oral Testimony Programme** has been included below, which may be adapted as appropriate for use with the local community. However, something which gives greater guidance as to what restrictions should be imposed might be more appropriate if materials are being sent to another institution for storage. The **Interview Agreement with Restrictions** form based on that used by the **Southern Oral History Programme** of the History Department of the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**, may be appropriate for those seeking to deposit their materials in an archive.¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.unc.edu/depts/sohp/restrictions.html>

CONDITIONS OF USE FORM

(One copy for your organisation, one for the speaker)

Narrator's Name.....

Address.....
.....

1.) I agree that the tapes of the interview(s) given by me on the following date(s)..... should be made available by *** organisation to members and researchers (delete as appropriate)

2.) I agree that *** organisation may publish or cause to allow to be published all or part of the interview transcripts

3.) I wish the following restrictions to be placed on the use of the tapes and transcripts (if no restrictions write 'none')

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Narrators Signature.....

Date.....

Interview Agreement With Restrictions

The (*name of project*) is a project of (*name of organisation*). Tape recordings and transcripts resulting from interviews conducted for the project will be stored (*name of place where they will be kept*). They may be made available for use to researchers and public dissemination only in accord with any restrictions placed on their use by the interviewee and/or the interviewer.

We, the undersigned, have read this agreement and agree to allow (*name of project and organisation running project*) to make use of the information contained on tape recordings and on transcripts in line with the intentions of the project as discussed. Given that the material may be of use to other researchers in the future, we agree to allow the materials to be used with the following restrictions:

The researcher must obtain the interviewee's/interviewer's permission to read or listen to the interview. (Circle one or both) YES/NO

The researcher must obtain the interviewee's/interviewer's permission to quote from the interview. (Circle one or both) YES/NO

The interview shall be closed to researchers until (give date)

Other restrictions and conditions if material is used
.....
.....
.....

Name of Interviewer

Name of Interviewee

Signature

Signature

Contact

Contact

Date

Date

Key points to consider

- ◆ Power is tipped in favour of the interviewer so do not exploit this in the interview or afterwards when using the material
- ◆ Be clear in your explanation of the project, be clear about where the tapes will end up and how they will be used - and about any other materials or formats which may arise directly from the tapes
- ◆ Honour any commitments you make. Do not imply that you can help narrators or promise more than you can fulfil in order to gain their co-operation
- ◆ Consider what is culturally acceptable to thank people for their assistance - and be consistent; don't cause bad feeling by treating people differently and favouring some more than others
- ◆ Be aware of how your narrator talks about other members of the community. Don't encourage too many negative remarks about specific people. Be especially aware of this if you are intending to make the tapes or other materials public.
- ◆ Ensure that Informed Consent really does mean that the person is properly informed about the project and how their words are likely to be used. Don't make assumptions about the value they 'should', in your view, attach to their contribution¹²

¹² *Giving Voice*, Panos, London, 1999, p.26

HISTORY AND ORAL TRADITION

Many people find their interest in oral tradition is not taken seriously. Are we supposed to believe that the miraculous stories of supermen and spirits that we find in many of the Origin Myths and oral traditions of Burma's communities are **factually true**? Many of us consider this a ridiculous suggestion. Misunderstandings also arise when people assume that one intends to use such traditions as an *unqualified alternative* to source based history, rather than as its supplement or complement. So, what is the point of recording and researching oral traditions? Is there any historical value to what has been passed on through generations? How can we incorporate these traditions in our written accounts of a community's history and still be taken seriously? If we are to answer these questions positively, we have to take a realistic view of the value of oral traditions, and also of their limitations. It may be that asking whether these stories are factually true is completely misleading - they may be 'true' in an entirely different way, relating to what they can tell us about the philosophy, world view, social and cultural systems of the society from which they emerged. We also have to be aware of what happens when we write these traditions down as part of the recording process and convert them to texts - because then they become very different kinds of sources than a one-off performance that may change through the telling.

Some historians of African history have developed a very specialised technique for discerning historical information in oral traditions. However, other people prefer to consider oral traditions primarily as a repository of cultural information. As with all the other sources, it is perfectly acceptable to use oral traditions as 'documents' in their own right - as long as they are considered critically and that enough information about how the 'document' was created is made available to people so that they can assess the validity of your point of view. Whether you want to incorporate oral tradition in a written history of your community, or whether you seek merely to record these forms as a cultural record, the points below detail important information that should accompany any recording you may make to ensure that it has long term use for your community, and for others who are interested in such things.

Oral tradition as process

Oral traditions are **messages** transmitted by word of mouth beyond the lifetime of the person passing them on

- ⇒ Messages are created whenever anyone speaks. Messages might also be expressed as stories, histories, dreams, songs etc.
- ⇒ When someone passes on the message, a process of transmission starts which can involve some re-interpretation or adaptation of what is said - the form and detail of the message may change. We don't know how the message may have changed or who changed it; there is no 'original', 'true' version of an oral tradition in that sense.

- ⇒ Oral traditions will change over the course of generations but some acquire a stabilised form that only varies in details. The context of the performance is therefore crucial to understanding what the message might have been in the past - WHY it was told

The 'evidence' of oral tradition does not, therefore, relate crucially to whether events related were actual events or observations. Their value lies in the opinions, values and philosophy of the community or group in which they are communicated. The messages that are passed on through generations usually became symbolic, they are generalisations about that society - they relate to the society from which they emerged in a meaningful way.

Oral tradition as performance

The oral nature of the tradition dictates that each recitation/narration/performance is unique. It may share similarities with others of the same genre or type, but it will also differ from any other performance. It is important that information about both the **performer** and the **performance** accompanies any recording, or text, of a tradition. Such information about the person, the place, the event etc. is crucial if the material is to be interpreted by those who were not present when the recording was made. Therefore, we need to consider who the person speaking/singing etc. is, and what the situation is in which we are recording or listening to them. The skills and techniques of different performances and performers vary considerably and the audience themselves can influence the performance.

- ⇒ The **performer** - information about his/her skills, experience, whether they are specialists or not, their background, their relationship to the person recording etc
- ⇒ The traditional reproduction of the **performance** - when and why would it normally be performed: frequency, time, place, occasion, intention
- ⇒ **Memory techniques** during the performance - how does the performer remember what he or she has to say/sing etc.? Structure of the recitation as a memory aid, repetition of phrases, images, use of music
- ⇒ How is the tradition **learned** and **transmitted**? How does the performer add 'personal touches' or make his or her own performance distinct within the wider tradition, yet also conform to it?
- ⇒ **Variability** - how does the tradition vary from place to place, time to time and person to person?

Making a text from an oral performance

The student of oral tradition may often take part in the creation of a text from a performance, which may then become the focus of his or her research. Writing down a spoken tradition 'fixes' that tradition in a way that was not the original intention of the spoken form. We therefore need to consider the relationship between the recording and any text that may be produced from it.

The recording

- ❖ There are two main concerns that need to be addressed in the recording process itself:
 - 1) How does the recording relate to the performance (were only sections recorded etc.? Is the transcript a full transcript, a summary or an extract?)
 - 2) How typical was the performance and in what ways was it affected by the process of recording?
- ❖ We also need to consider if there are any other written records of this oral tradition and how they relate to the recording and transcript that we have made? These may be in historical records, books, and the references may be either accidental or intentional.
- ❖ What was the nature of the research of which the text formed a part? How did the researcher 'create' and 'shape' the document?

The text

When a text is made, it represents something more permanent than an oral performance. If all the above information is not given then any claims we may make for it as either history or tradition are meaningless because the criteria of research and analysis that we apply to documentary sources are all absent. We cannot evaluate or assess or interpret what is recorded because it exists only as an isolated example about which we have no reliable and verifiable information. In this situation, our claims for the value of the material may be quite rightly ridiculed. However, if we do supply the information outlined above, we can make use of a recorded and/or transcribed oral tradition in many ways that are not possible simply by listening to a once-only performance.

- ❖ We can examine the **linguistic structure** of the tradition in more detail - the use of vocabulary for example. Many people who speak minority languages in Burma feel that their languages are 'disappearing' - such a text is a good way of ensuring

that items of vocabulary are recorded; they can also contribute to the development of a distinct literary style in the language concerned as the tradition moves from an oral to a textual context.

- ❖ We can examine the internal **structure** of the performance in more detail - the repetition of ideas, the development of the performance, major and minor episodes, use of drama, use of imagery, characterisation, setting, notions of time etc. We can also examine the ways in which the process of memory and recall is assisted during the performance by the repetition of phrases etc.
- ❖ We can start to examine the tradition more closely as an example of a **genre** of material, we can understand the social, cultural and political category to which the performance belongs

The message

When we have considered this information about the performer, the performance and the structure of the tradition, we can start to understand the message that is transmitted by it. In this we will always need the assistance of those who are informed about the language and culture from which the tradition emerged, although outsiders may also be able to give insights that are not always discernible to those who have great familiarity with these traditions. Informants are needed who can give information about the use of language - metaphor, imagery, the way in which social taboos are presented, 'double talk', implied meanings. We must also accept that certain aspects of the tradition may be untranslatable or partially unintelligible - but this does not make the whole performance invalid as a source of information.

◆ The social message

- ⇒ What was the context of performances in the past ? Were they linked to an institution; were they public or private; what was the role and social position of the performer and how could performance influence this? When were they recited? Were they recited to justify a particular social system or institution; did they express an ideology that was used against others; did they idealise certain groups or types of people?

◆ The cultural message

- ⇒ What does the tradition reveal about the culture from which it arises? How can we evidence change through the tradition?
- ⇒ How are ideas of space and time, history, change and causes of change expressed?

- ⇒ What can we learn of ideas of human nature and conduct, of the social philosophy of the culture concerned?
- ⇒ What images and stereotypes exist in the tradition and what are their social and cultural context and importance?
- ⇒ Is it important that the tradition is/was considered 'historically true' now or in the past - and have these notions of 'truth' about the tradition changed? If so, why? Is it possible for the tradition to be considered true but not factual? What is the importance of this difference?

A pool of information

It is the collective renderings of traditions that give them value, not as 'proof' or evidence of historical 'factuality' by mere weight of numbers, but because we can see the interdependence of traditions upon each other and can therefore learn something about the society which has used these traditions as a means of remembering. By comparing different versions of events we can learn how these traditions are structured, how chronologies and genealogies are remembered and transmitted and we can also understand the notions of history that influence these traditions.

'A FOLK SONG CAN BE TRANSFORMED INTO A NATIONAL ANTHEM'¹³

It is clear that many oral traditions are not and were never politically or socially neutral - they were used to support certain social structures, institutions, customs and ideologies. Similarly, the recording and transcribing of oral histories and traditions today amongst Burma's minority ethnic communities is not politically neutral and can raise many issues of contemporary importance both within communities and between neighbouring groups. However, we must beware if this is the entire object of recording and writing our histories or of collecting and recording oral materials. Such activities often lead to the destruction of the very things that they are claiming to preserve.

This situation is not unique to Burma's minority communities. Below is an example of some of the problems experienced when an oral tradition and oral history programme was started in Namibia in Africa. The political objectives of the programme started to overwhelm it, leading to it becoming a very controversial project - with many analogies to the situation among Burma's communities:

¹³ 'Ideology and Oral History Institutions in Southeast Asia', Lysa H., in *Oral History in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, 1998, p.42

Namibian Oral History: A Question Of Politics

Because oral testimony can empower people - minorities, special interest groups, individuals - it can become an intensely political and politicised activity.

Before independence, the history of Namibia was very largely written by white South African and German historians and a scattering of European missionary and traveller 'eyewitnesses'. ... Since independence there has been a growing movement among Namibians to redress the balance and record indigenous versions of Namibian history. The result has been the ambitious - and controversial - Namibian Orature Project (NOP), where 'orature' encompasses oral history, literature and tradition.

The NOP has run into difficulties. It has discovered that there are competing versions of oral 'evidence' that undermine the search for collective Namibian history. A vivid example is the life of the Herero leader, Samuel Maharero, who was both a resistance hero and pragmatic political leader. The only full, published life of Maharero, by a South African professor drawing largely on archival sources, has been condemned as a travesty, slanderous and factually wrong, by many Herero savants - keepers of oral tradition. Of particular concern to the savants, quite apart from errors in lineage, were the aspersions cast on Maharero's courage and sobriety, largely based on written German sources. ... Another problem has been the political agenda. The different political parties are seeking Herero votes. They want to establish, in their favour, their place in the struggle for independence. Each party views the oral history of their opponents with suspicion. Add to this the concerns of other major groups, such as the Herero's traditional rivals the Nama, that the Herero oral history project was attempting to place Herero history at the top of a hierarchy of Namibian history, and it is easy to see why oral history collection has become such a hot political issue in a new African state striving to blend disparate tribal nations into a one nation 'new Namibia'.

The Namibian experience helps to illustrate the dangers of assuming that oral history can provide a 'correct' or 'agreed' version of events. It can only offer 'perceived' versions. While these should be useful complements to the 'received' version, and can go some way to helping peoples and nations draw strength from the rich diversity of their traditions, cultures and historical memories, they can also destabilise relations between groups. Oral history, like any 'history', can both combat and fuel propaganda.

However, despite the warnings of the above experience, the Namibian programme is also being used very successfully to raise awareness of oral culture and its role in the development of the nation. The difficulties do not make the attempt worthless - but the potentially destructive power of such work needs to be guarded against. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, there are political pressures affecting the use of oral tradition and oral history which are difficult to resist, not just those affecting Burma and her various communities. Hong Lysa, a specialist in Tai and Singaporean history, states:

*'Southeast Asian societies do not possess a tradition of independent scholarship. In the pre-colonial days, history-writing and other intellectual and religious activities were carefully preserved as the prerogative of the court, and were a function of politics. ... Similarly, historical research, when encouraged in the post-colonial countries, often has the burden of promoting what is perceived to be the 'national interest', or 'nation building'. It is thus very likely that the national repositories of oral history materials in these countries owe their very existence to the consideration by the political leadership that such institutions, along with the media and textbooks, have a role in defining for the population just what are the events considered to be historically significant, and how they ought to be understood.'*¹⁴

'Political leadership' in this case can also refer to local community leaders who try to impose a 'correct' view out of what they see as immediate political necessity. In the present situation it is extremely difficult for anyone involved or interested in this work with Burma's minority communities, especially if they are from the communities themselves, to resist or overcome these pressures. However, it is essential that

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.36

whatever importance we attach to these materials today, that we do not destroy that which it may have tomorrow. By ensuring that information is accompanied by appropriate references and that recordings are properly catalogued, it is possible to go a long way towards improving the status of local writing, as well as ensuring that the material is of value to future generations, who may, after all, want to use the materials in different ways, and will want to make their own interpretations and judgements of it.

A Case Study of an Oral Tradition from Burma and its potential contribution to our historical understanding: The Kachin *Gumsa-Gumlao* debate

There are very few good quality, modern publications available from which we may learn about Burma and her diverse communities. Inevitably in this situation, the debates that are generated about Burma tend to refer constantly to a limited number of books and then, over time, the debates become ever more removed and abstracted from the realities with which they claim to be dealing. An example of this is the key position occupied by the text *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* for anyone interested in the far north of Burma and her communities there. This was written by Edmund Leach and was first published in London in 1954. The book continues to be a standard text and has spawned a theoretical debate amongst anthropologists which has persisted for nearly fifty years; a debate, however, which has rarely brought to light any new evidence relating to the Kachin peoples themselves.

Leach was an anthropologist who first went to Burma in 1939 to do fieldwork in the Kachin (Jinghpaw) village of Hpalang, near the border with China, but his plans were altered by the outbreak of the Second World War. His book details his ideas about *gumsa-gumlao*, which have been very influential. Leach thought that *gumsa* was a system epitomised by the hereditary rule of Kachin chiefs, who were entitled to take certain dues from the villagers who came under their authority. Leach felt that these chiefs were inclined to make their rule more and more oppressive, partly to emulate the rights of a Shan *Sawbwa*. Over time, the Kachin villagers would rebel against this and would set up an egalitarian system without a hereditary chief, which Leach called *gumlao*. Gradually over time, this would become again a system of *gumsa*, and Leach's main hypothesis was that, historically, Kachin communities revealed a tendency to oscillate between these two systems. Over the years, a debate has developed around Leach's ideas - but the debate has been focussed more upon Leach's words in relation to other theories than on any re-evaluation of evidence from Kachin societies themselves.

Leach based much of his thesis upon a study of historical documents written by western officers, missionaries and administrators who used the term *gumlao* with little scrutiny as to how it had first entered their vocabularies - and thence their archives. Yet when we consider the understanding of the categories *gumsa* and *gumlao* by Kachin communities today we find important differences with the interpretation Leach gives us. Today, the indigenous (Jinghpaw) political systems identified by Kachin nationalists are *gumchyng gumsa* (rule by a chief who exacts customary rights, often excessively) and *gumrawng gumtsa* (a more benevolent form of authority; rule may be by a benevolent, hereditary chief or an elected headman). *Gumlau* is perceived not as a system but as a process of upheaval and rebellion, a means by which the demands of a despotic chief could be brought back to a level which the community could bear. The term also tends to have negative connotations when the process fails to resolve itself in the system of *gumrawng gumtsa*, leading to lawlessness and 'anarchy'.

So how can we explain this difference between contemporary local explanations of Kachin socio-political structures and those of Leach? Was Leach wrong, or are these just different ways of writing about the same thing? Although we know that contemporary understandings of the term are almost bound to be different to those of Leach's day, is it possible that most anthropologists have based their understanding of Kachin society on incorrect interpretations - and most importantly, *how will we ever know?* Although we will never be sure, we can at least add some depth to the debate through **a study of Kachin (Jinghpaw) oral tradition**. At least in this way we can refer to how local people explained their own society, rather than rely on those who sought to interpret it for them.

If we consider the oral tradition that details the mythic origins of these various systems, we can learn much about the possible confusions that arise when complex ideas and concepts are

being explained in a simplified form to people who are unfamiliar with local custom. When asked by a British officer, 'Are you *gumlao*?', most villagers would answer 'Yes' or 'No' and the term would become a reference in communication between the Kachin and the British which did not necessarily reflect the complexity of local understandings. For example, when we look at the linguistic and rhythmic structure of the oral tradition *Chyup Chya Nga*, in which the mythic origins of *gumrawng gumtsa* are explained and justified, we learn that there is a need for couplets to be used to construct the rhyme and rhythm of the recitation. Consider this extract from a recitation performed in 1992 by a Kachin spirit priest (*dumsa*) from an area above the confluence of the Mali and Nmai rivers, which used to be occupied by many people of the Lahpai clan, who were considered by the British before Independence as the main protagonists of the *gumlau* 'system'. The recitation was made in Myitkyina and was not accompanied by an offering:

*Ya gumrawng gumtsa nga ai matut gaw,
Ningdung lep ma hkringwa yu gaw,
E gumlau nga ai ninghpang nchyan hprep dumsa yu gaw
Gumchying gumsa rau gumrawng gumtsa garan ai
Gumlau mungkhawng mung kachyan ai*

A free translation of this would be:

Now I am going to chant about the origin of gumrawng gumtsa, I will chant roughly and will 'cut the top off' [i.e. give only the essentials], and will tell about how gumchying gumsa and gumrawng gumtsa became separate from the original place of upheaval [gumlau].

Gumchying and *gumsa* are couplets, as are *gumrawng* and *gumtsa*; *gumlau* is later seen to be a couplet with its synonym *gumle*. The couplets are essential for the tradition to be recited according to the correct tune - and it is one reason why local people themselves never refer to a system called *gumsa*, but always *gumchying gumsa*, for example. From this we can also clarify a point of confusion noted by the Deputy Commissioner at Myitkyina, Mr W. A. Hertz, in his *Report on a visit to the Hukawng Valley in March-April* [IOR:Mss Eur/F/116/82]

¶62 - *From Gatawk to Magwitawng*

From Magwitawng to the Malikha (Irrawaddy) is said to be a journey of ten days over three high ranges of hills. There is very little lowland paddy cultivation here and the people live mostly by taungya cutting. There are about a hundred and fifty slaves in the village and 22 guns. The akyiwas will not admit that their villagers are kumlaus, and say that they are kumlaokumsas, which is contradiction in terms, as a kumsa is the opposite of a kumlau, the two words being antithetical. However, the double word expresses what they mean, namely, that the people are republicans in sentiment, but have not openly declared themselves kumlaus.

However, if we study the oral tradition we learn that *kumlaokumsa* is not a contradiction in terms:

*Gumlau gumtsa mung wundan tu ai jaw latsa e, gumlau mung ngan nga rat.
Prat latsa e gumrawng gumtsa mung ngan jat
[Gumrawng gumsta will develop over many centuries and will be very stable and secure]*

The rhythm of the recitation demands this time that *gumlau* be paired with *gumtsa*. Such terms, albeit not entirely inter-changeable, were flexible and conveyed meaning in context. This is something to which Mr Hertz appears to be alluding, but he did not have enough information to understand this apparent 'contradiction' more fully.

But what is the relationship between this oral tradition and the political process that it is describing? This is also something that Leach does not deal with, but can help us understand why, surprisingly, Kachin people generally feel the term *gumlao* is negative (just as the term 'Kachin' was itself disliked locally at first). If we look again at the historical record, the first

mention of the term *gumlao/kumlau* in British archives is probably that contained in the private journal of Captain Jenkins, the Agent on the North East Frontier in 1832, held in the **British Library** in London [IOR: MSS EUR F/257/3 - *Captain Jenkins' Private Journal No.3 1832*]. At this time, the British were not interested in the term as a sign of potentially 'revolutionary' groups, which later greatly influenced their interpretation of *gumlao*. Jenkins states of the Singpho on the Assam-Burma border:

'When in their own country and before the plunder of Assam furnished them with slaves they appear to have cultivated their lands and carried on all other purposes of domestic life by means of a species of voluntary servitude entered into by the poorer and more destitute individuals of their own people who when reduced to want were in habit of selling themselves into bondage either temporary or for life to their chiefs or more prosperous neighbours. They sometimes resorted to this step in order to obtain wives of the daughters and in either case were incorporated with the family performing agricultural and domestic service but under no degradation. Singphos in this state of dependence were called Goom Lao.'

Another use of the term *gumlao/kumlao* is that of a ritual that was used to cast out a witch from a village. From studies of similar ritual practices elsewhere, we know that it is quite common for oppressed groups (like, for example, those socially demeaned as 'goom lao') to seek to improve their status by the performance of ritual activities in the community, often involving a power to communicate with spirits such as shamanism etc. However, where the performance of these rituals and the possession of related special powers becomes potentially threatening to the dominant group, it can lead to accusations of witchcraft and of evil intent towards the community, and thence to that person (or group) being thrown out of the community. From this we can hypothesise a possible scenario for the emergence of these different (but connected) categories of *gumlao* in Jinghpaw society.

In itself, the tradition does not dispute the fundamentals of Leach's ideas as he *intended* them to be understood, but it contributes **new levels of insight** which can help us to ensure that the later development of such debates remain true to the subject with which they claim to be dealing. Most importantly, by studying this oral tradition we can learn more about the local interpretation of political processes which have so far been neglected. In a situation in which political pressures on all sides inhibit our ability to reconstruct histories impartially, such oral traditions (which are, of course, themselves not immune from such pressures) may provide a degree of insight that is unavailable from other 'conventional', documented, historical sources.



Pt 3 - LISTENING & DEVELOPMENT

Oral Research and Development Issues

- Case studies 1-3

Education and Oral History

- Sample oral history lesson plans

Creating an Archive and Cultural Preservation

- What is an archive?
- Oral archives in Southeast Asia
- Memory Banks

ORAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

In this section, a number of extracts will be presented from the publication *Listening For A Change* (Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, Panos, London, 1993) produced by the Panos Institute Oral Testimony Programme. This organisation has extensive experience of using oral testimony projects in development work in many parts of the world. The underlying ethos of such work is that, if any development process is to be successful, its starting point must be the need for those who devise and implement policy to listen to the voices and experiences of those individuals and communities who are themselves the focus of policies and programmes. This can involve listening to the oral testimony of recent experience. It is the experiential aspect of this kind of oral history that leads to it sometimes being termed **Oral Testimony**. But good development work in societies with traditionally strong oral cultures should also involve raising awareness in decision-makers of the historical and cultural context in which experience is interpreted and expressed by the community - of raising awareness of their oral culture in general. This creates deeper levels of understanding and assists in the process of devising successful programmes.

*'The historical dimension - Another central element of effective development dialogue is an understanding and appreciation of history and social change. Most poverty and inequality has a pattern and a history, and any improved future for a community must unfold from a knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of its present and its past. Inequalities may have roots in a number of different factors - political, economic, environmental, cultural, personal - all of which have a historical dimension.'*²³

In many communities, oral culture is still important and this represents a different way of thinking for those decision makers and élite groups who decide policy and who are more reliant on the written word as a form of communication, and as a process in decision making through the writing of reports, policy documents etc. :

²³ *Listening for a change*, Slim H. & Thompson P., Panos, London, 1993, p.21

A first step in any development dialogue, therefore, must be to acknowledge and respect the predominantly oral culture of many poor communities. An essentially oral culture will be unfamiliar to most development workers and researchers. Many will have been brought up in highly literate societies and will be used to testing and communicating their ideas on paper through the written word. Others may have become detached from the oral culture of their families by receiving formal, Western-influenced education.

Such people can find themselves strangely ill-informed in a society where the written word has less importance than the spoken word. They become the ignorant ones, with little access to the knowledge possessed by the community. And, just as oral cultures can be suspicious of the printed word, because it expresses power and law, so literacy breeds its own scepticism about and suspicion about oral information and knowledge. The subjective and selective nature of memory, the power of community and personal myth, the different ways of estimating and recording time, quantity, distance and so on - all these fuel the tendency of the literate to devalue oral evidence.

Because of these factors, large parts of people's experience and expertise can - and often does - remain invisible to development workers, and untapped during development planning. ... [Adapting] to oral communication and accepting its value ... is not as simple as it might seem. Many literate people lack the skills needed in an oral culture - skills like listening, asking, telling, using ritual expressions, memorising and handing on information by word of mouth alone.²⁴

²⁴ *ibid*, p.19-20

Oral History and Development Programmes

Case Study 1: The Cost of No Consultation

The arid marginal lands of the Mazviha region of Zimbabwe still bare the scars of the Rhodesian government's centralisation policy of the 1960s, when the authorities overrode the traditional farming practices and ordered the deforestation and cultivation of previously untouched toplands. Local farmers, who were not consulted at the time but spoke their minds through an oral history project in the 1980s, recognised that this practice as well as other aspects of centralisation have greatly accelerated soil erosion in the region. The new linear layout of housing settlements, for example, meant that the traditional system for the design and management of paths for people and cattle was abandoned. New paths had to fit in with the imposed centralised settlement patterns and even accommodate government Landrovers. They were seen as another major cause of gulleys and high degree of soil erosion, as a local farmer, Mr Chibidi explained:

In the old days paths were carefully laid out. They used to zig-zag. If one developed a gully it would be moved. With centralisation, paths were defined between the fields ... lots of people used them endlessly without changing them. Also people make their own short cuts without thinking.

Before centralisation, according to Mr Chikombeka, another farmer, careful soil conservation practices were followed:

People had a lot of knowledge about this. They fenced their homes with gates that would direct the movement of people. If a road was bad it would be stopped. Cases over this could be brought to a court, it was a crime. In the 1950s people could still be fined for bad behaviour in regard to paths ... If a gully started, people avoided using that section of the path. They simply told people not to, cutting a branch of chitarara (gardenia spatulifolia), placing it across the old path. This tree has its laws. They then pegged logs in the incipient gully and put in leaves to trap the sand so that grass would grow.

The so-called technical expertise of the government agriculturalists also contributed to the worsening soil erosion. Farmers disagreed with the government policy of controlling bush encroachment in the grazing areas. This 'de-bushing' policy had existed since the 1930s and was based on the principle that fewer shrubs and trees would allow for more plentiful grass. It has continued to be actively encouraged by government extension workers. However, the local farmers have always recognised that more grass and less bush results in more soil erosion and fewer woodland products. The government's introduction of ox-ploughing to replace intensive hoe cultivation is equally regretted by the Mazviha farming community. It has been another factor changing the way in which soil and water behave in the watershed and has made for faster and more concentrated patterns, as Mr Magwidi described:

Water used to be scattered in the landscape; now it is concentrated and flows to the rivers ... When you plough across a slope it leads to water collecting at one place, and when it gets an outlet it will do so with great force.

The oral history interviews recorded during this research gave farmers a chance to explain their knowledge and recount the history of agricultural mismanagement in their area. Much of their testimony was verified by extensive aerial photographs of Mazvihwa in 1939. These show that conditions in the watershed then were not as bad as they are today and provide evidence of the effectiveness of the previous systems of land management. The farmers' oral testimony also shows how local peoples' farming experience and expertise - their indigenous technical knowledge - can so often remain unheard and be overridden by centralised policy and planning, in this case for several decades.

Case Study 2: Displacement and Survival Strategies

An oral history project with two displaced communities in Mozambique revealed how their different characteristics helped and hindered adaptation to changed circumstances.

The largest recorded movement of Tacuane-speaking people took place in 1986, when 13,000 fled to Mocuba, Mozambique, after a major RENAMO attack. Their testimonies contain graphic descriptions of killing, flight and separation. On arrival they were given shelter in government centres and emergency aid which lasted for two years. During this time, relations between the displaced and this host community deteriorated: [The host community] hated us because we received food and clothes,' said Favor Mario.

But when official aid stopped, things went from bad to worse as the displaced people inevitably became dependent on the local community. Their land allocations were too small to allow self-sufficiency and they were forced to work as *ganyo-ganyo* (agricultural labourers), often neglecting their own fields. They were soon totally dependent in the original inhabitants, who paid them in grain and clothes. Armindo Evazungo, one of the Tacuane-speaking people, describes this vicious cycle:

Doing ganyo-ganyo this year means doing it next year and the following year and so on. If, for example, your wife is going to do ganyo-ganyo that means that you won't harvest very much and you will soon run out of your food reserve. You will always be begging.

This virtual slave labour took on a new and damaging dimension when the host community demanded that women only should work in the fields. This division of labour was unprecedented in Tacuane culture and was made worse by the fact that the employers only paid them in women's clothes. Women suddenly had control of the resources in the household. Deep feelings of animosity gradually developed: men felt marginalised and powerless while women felt overworked and unsupported. Vineza Sabonete expressed the women's point of view:

Men are becoming boring fellows these days. They behave like children just because we do not bring them trousers. We are not supposed to sustain men; they are supposed to sustain us. I do ganyo-ganyo and I gain some clothes. Sometimes I wear them myself or give them to the girls. I also made sheets out of them for us and for the children. Besides, who brings vegetables home? Me, not him. So he should thank me for that.

Men's feelings of resentment and powerlessness increased and were reflected in a collapse of social and sexual mores and a rise in insulting behaviour. With so many families split up by the civil war, many women lacked uncles, fathers and husbands to protect them and help resolve conflict. At the same time, the need for kinship support and arbitration grew as men's harassment of women increased. Flore Nhanala explains:

In our home area, each man had his spear and nobody would dare to harass a woman if they knew she was the wife, daughter or niece of such and such ... but here most of us do not have relatives and men are different. We have stopped talking to them about what they do. There is no point in talking to them. They start to drink. They bring us troubles because they have to cheat someone to get the drink. They insult us. We don't talk any more ... this is war. If this war ended we could go back and they could work as they always did.

The Nyo-speaking people were displaced more gradually between 1981 and 1985, until 10,000 of them were living in the cramped *bairro* on the outskirts of Mocuba. Their community survived much better than that of the Tacuane people by virtue of a more entrepreneurial strategy. Their social and economic history had been more varied and they had a tradition of migrant labour. This gave their community an important 'elasticity' which allowed them to continue trading and to allow them to continue trading and to adapt to separation and dispersal. They gravitated naturally towards other migrant labourers and traders, settled themselves in this community and so were not reliant on government assistance. Jovito Nunes, who collected the interviews, notes

that people spoke of a strong 'ideology of mutual help', which was typical of migrant labourers. The Nyo-speaking people were soon integrated into business and trading networks, working in thatching, brick-making, and selling dried fish and maize on the black market. Families also often separated by choice: husbands would do business in the *bairro* while women cultivated land they had been given. Ernesto Nangachinua explained the system:

When I came here I didn't know anybody. I was given a shelter by a family I didn't know. I worked for them for some time. I went to the fields with them in Namagoa. They also had a business here in Mocuba, selling cigarettes, dried fish, cooking oil and so on ... I had to be patient. I learned the channels, how to get things and where to sell them. I got on well with the head of the household and he gave me a plot of land. Most of them have huge plots of land in Namagoa which they don't cultivate, but they won't give them to you unless they trust you. To have these plots for yourself is very helpful because you have two homes. Now because of war we consider our main home to be here ... In Namagoa we have just a small hut for our wives and children to sleep in during the week while we do business here. In October, November and December we go there to help them because it is the height of the agricultural season. But when they hear about a possible RENAMO attack they [wives and children] run away and come back here.

This support system worked both ways, as Primo Manual explained:

If you live in a community like this where you don't have your real family you must be clever. You must help others so that they can help you when you are in need ... If I had no friends or contacts in this area I would get stuck ... A true man must move around here; you can't just expect these things will come to you.

This kind of research into patterns of flight and survival shows the importance, if effective support is to be given, of understanding people's particular asylum strategies, which have often been developed over time and draw on established contacts and practices.

Oral Tradition and Development Programmes

Case Study: Culture and Health Education

Ban Vanai refugee camp, in an isolated hilly region of Thailand, contains some 48,000 Hmong crowded onto about 400 acres. Not only is this the biggest settlement in the region, surpassing even the provincial capital, but it is the largest gathering of Hmong in the world. Formerly living in scattered mountaintop villages in northern Laos, the people began their refugee existence when US forces withdrew in 1975 and a government hostile to the Hmong assumed power.

Appalling overcrowding and inadequate housing, sanitation and waste facilities cause severe health and hygiene problems in the camp. The conventional health education approach, with its implicit message that the Hmong were dirty and irresponsible about hygiene, was a best ineffective and at worst offensive. But when a new approach, building on Hmong folklore and traditional forms of communication, was tried, it proved to be far more successful. It incorporated two elements relevant to wider development programmes: a sensitivity to the history and culture of the people concerned, and a recognition of the specific problems and constraints of the surrounding environment.

A group of refugees, including traditional healers and Hmong elders, worked with a local Thai employee of the International Rescue Committee and Dwight Conquergood, an American performance ethnographer, to produce, by trial and error, an environmental health campaign using performance. In doing so, they built on the one thing in the camps which was as flourishing as the diseases spread by poor sanitation: 'No matter where you go in the camp, at almost any hour of the day or night, you can simultaneously hear two or three performances,

from simple storytelling and folk singing to the elaborate collective ritual performances for the dead,' wrote Conquergood [REF]

The process of researching and developing the programme was as important as the end product. The team drew on stock characters and storylines in Hmong folklore and conveyed their messages using traditional forms of communication and education, such as proverbs and songs. Trial performances were staged to elicit audience feedback. Among the useful criticisms which helped the team develop and refine the programme was an elder's observation that the rhyming chants were not quite in keeping with traditional Hmong versification. He taught the young performers the correct patterns of speech, and ensured that the background music was authentic Hmong, rather than a version influenced by Thai or Western melodies.

On the health side, a key aspect was to develop understanding of the way in which the Hmong had formerly dealt with rubbish and sanitation, using methods which had been entirely appropriate to their environment. Instead of blaming the Hmong and trying to get them to change their behaviour on the basis that they caused the health problems, the important thing was to start with their radically changed living conditions and raise awareness of the implications of this for health. Thus the problem was located in the changed environmental circumstances; the solution was in adapting their practices.

The programme was effective, and Mother Clean, the collective creation of the performance company, had soon been integrated into camp culture and even featured in the important and elaborate Hmong New Year celebrations. However, with hindsight, Conquergood realised that the so-called cross-cultural communication was still too one-way. The expatriate health professionals needed consciousness-raising, too; many were highly trained physicians and nurses but had little understanding of Hmong culture. ... As Conquergood puts it: 'They desperately needed not just 'information' about Hmong culture, but serious interventions that would develop intercultural sensitivity and respect for difference.' More opportunities for the Hmong to direct performances at the 'experts', to educate them about their culture and life in the camp, would have reduced the lingering sense that it was only the Hmong who had something to learn, rather than something to teach others.

EDUCATION AND ORAL HISTORY

Another dimension to oral history and oral tradition collection, which is also connected with development, is the contribution that it can make to education - both in the development of more appropriate **materials at low-cost** and in developing a sense of **self-awareness and cultural esteem** among children who are experiencing high degrees of instability and change.

In such situations, the incorporation of traditional oral material into the curriculum can introduce more accessible and relevant teaching resources, as well as providing some sense of stability and continuity in periods of change and transition. Educational materials are usually expensive and often in short supply in schools, libraries and bookshops in many parts of the South;²⁵ the development of local materials can provide more resources - and more culturally appropriate ones - at lower cost. ... The need for indigenous educational material also becomes acute as people emerge from repression and dictatorial regimes

Below are two sample **lesson plans** which could be adapted and used in **community education projects** with communities from Burma. Outside Burma, these projects could be used by volunteer teachers to motivate children in English classes, for example, if this was considered the most suitable forum. Inside Burma, it might be possible to use them in Church School lessons in some communities which already run supplementary, independent education programmes during school holidays etc. -especially where these programmes are focussed around teaching children to read and write in their local community language.

²⁵ Panos prefers to use the geographical terms 'North' and 'South' rather than 'Developed' and 'Developing' nations as they believe that this more accurately reflects the nature of global economic divisions

Sample Oral History Lesson Plans²⁶

1. A TEAM APPROACH TO ORAL HISTORY

(Adapted from plans submitted by Elaine Seavey of Seminole High School, Oklahoma, US)

Objectives

The students will learn to appreciate the links between interviewing and writing skills - history and literature

A 'sense of community' will be developed and an appreciation of other members of the community and their knowledge, their value as 'living historians'

'History' will be related to the lives of real people

The various sites and people that are important in their community will be recorded

Students will learn skills of interviewing, editing, writing and presentation

Procedure

(If tape recorders are available, a class rota could be worked out for when pairs or small groups of students could borrow them)

If tape recorders are going to be used, the teacher must become familiar with how they work and with interviewing techniques. Someone from the local community could be invited to the class to be interviewed so that the teacher could demonstrate what to do, or a tape of a previous interview should be played in the class

Try to find out from the class about people or events in the local community about which the students would like to know more - some might be interested in learning about experiences of their grandparents or of well known local people, about events or about a particular custom or tradition

The students will then spend time thinking of questions that they would like to ask (use the later section in this manual for ways in which the students can be guided about asking questions). Many will find this very difficult - emphasise that the pre-prepared questions are only to give them some ideas, they are not a rigid list. Follow-up questions are important - but the key thing is that they learn as much as possible about the person they are talking to and what he or she is telling them

Students record the interview or make notes. These will then be brought to the class and they will work on writing up the interview, ensuring that background information about the speaker is given. Some may like to draw pictures or to take photographs of the person or of the places about which he/she was talking, if appropriate.

²⁶ These lesson plans are adapted from materials available on the internet site www.AskEric.com.html.

All the interviews can be gathered together in a class book or displayed. Most students will take great pride in the way this work is presented and will feel a real sense of achievement if it is displayed to others

2. EXPLORING OUR ROOTS

(Adapted from plans submitted by Sandy Bahan, Norman Central Middle/High School, Norman, Oklahoma, US)

Objectives

- The sharing of family histories through oral history and oral tradition**
- The personalization of community and national history helping students to make generalisations about their community based on the realities of community experience**
- To identify the places where their families have lived over as extended a timeframe as possible**
- To identify the timeframes of these movements/migrations, as far as possible**
- To identify the main reasons why these various movements took place**
- To identify ways that they can continue to study this history by interviews or other resources**

Procedures

- Each student should talk to members of their family to find out as much as possible about their family's history in both living memory and family oral tradition. They should bring with them to the class as much information as possible about people, places, reasons for movement etc. Some students will have much more information than others - but it is a good idea to time the start of this project to coincide with community festivals at which many members of the family come together, if appropriate. For students who find this difficult for whatever reason, they could work as pairs or small groups - and most students would probably prefer this approach anyway. The students prepare an oral presentation to the class**
- After the class has discussed their findings and compared what they have learned, they should then decide to interview one or two members of their family more closely asking for information about any well known people in family tradition - 'colourful' characters or significant events**
- This new information may be written up and illustrated with maps etc. and displayed or collected together as a book, if appropriate**
- Students consider how what they have learned about their families relates to their what they know about national and world history and identify ways that they could learn more through reading or interviewing etc.**

Obviously these lesson plans can be adapted and developed according to the interests of the students and their own situation and could be extended over several weeks. Other follow-up activities might relate to objects (photographs, items of dress etc.) that are of historic value in their communities and how they can be looked after for future generations.

CREATING AN ARCHIVE AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Whilst oral testimonies may be used in relation to quite specific development project goals, it is clear that even just the process of collecting and archiving oral histories and oral traditions may have considerable impact on development issues. This kind of collection of materials for non-specific purposes is known as an 'archive'.

What is an archive?

Your family's photograph album is a collection of your family's memories - its history. You can look at yourself ten years ago and see how different you looked - or your friends can point out the changes to you. Every time you open an album of your family's photographs to show to visitors, you are showing them a part of your family **archive**. 'Archive' is the word used by historians, librarians, museum curators and researchers in the social sciences for the records they have collected and which may be used for research in many different ways. An archive is basically a collection of memories, records from the past just like your photograph album, which you can look at again and again.

Most archives have traditionally been based on collections of pieces of paper - letters, notes, books, diaries, photographs etc. - but new technology means that cassette tapes, video tapes, CDs etc., may be included and are as important for archives as are pieces of paper. A large part of any archive usually consists of very ordinary pieces of information: letters, diaries, photographs, things which by themselves appear unimportant but, when collected together, contain a lot of useful information. It is not always obvious what use the archive may have - sometimes it is many years, or even many centuries in the case of countries with long traditions of written literature, before the importance of a particular letter or document becomes clear. For example, researchers of Asian and Southeast Asian history are constantly reviewing collections of old Chinese documents for information - the documents may have been looked at many times in the past, but we can always interpret them in new ways and find new information. Furthermore, the records contained in an archive may have different points of interest for different people - a simple photograph may have many different pieces of information depending upon the interests of the person looking at it.

The main point about an archive, therefore, is that it is both a collection and a resource of materials that may be used for many different purposes and by many different people in the future - future uses that we cannot always predict.

What is the difference between my family's photograph album and an 'archive'?

When you show someone your family photograph album, you have all the information in your head. You can recognise all your family members and you know the places and events where the photographs were taken. You can tell your visitor all about the pictures if they want to know who, or what, is in the picture, or when it was taken. But if you gave the album to a complete stranger, it would be almost useless to them - or at the very least it would take them a great deal of time and effort to work out who the people and places are - and they might make many mistakes in the process. A great deal of such work could be avoided if the photographs were accompanied by

information to explain the pictures. It is, therefore, very important that **anything recorded for an archive be accompanied by information which will help complete strangers in the future to understand what the document/record is - where it was made, who or what is 'contained' in it etc.**

Oral archives in Southeast Asia

Many oral history and oral tradition programmes in Southeast Asia were initiated to build archives of materials. Rather than being started by researchers investigating specific issues, most of the organisations in the region that are engaged in this work are National Archives and Libraries. Most follow the methodology used by other museums, archives and libraries elsewhere in the world: that one should record and archive materials in **quantity** and with **depth**, with a view to a quite indeterminate range of possible future uses.¹⁶

Making a strong archive of materials, whether large or small, involves a time-consuming transcription, annotation and cataloguing process, but it has many rewards. Below is a justification of the idea of creating an archive of oral materials, and an example of its practical implementations, as recorded by the Panos Oral Testimony Programme.¹⁷

Memory banks

'An old man dies ...a book is lost!'

This African saying has particular poignancy in the Caribbean region, where so much of the cultural heritage, particularly the African, is unrecorded. In 1981, in an attempt to rescue a whole 'library' of knowledge and skills, the Jamaica Memory Bank was established. It aimed to document the country's heritage 'by tapping the memories of our Senior Citizens so that their knowledge can be available for posterity.' The project was the initiative of a small group of people, whose pioneering work in the social sciences and documentation of folk music had alerted them to the rate at which Jamaica's traditional knowledge and culture were disappearing. The Memory Bank was soon supported by a much larger island-wide team, and by 1984 the project had inspired a regional seminar, which resulted in the setting up of a network of memory banks throughout the Caribbean.

In this region a key factor in the waning of traditional culture and history is the influence of mass media, which bring North American entertainment and values right into people's homes. But more importantly, many Caribbean people are descendants of African slaves, who were actively discouraged from continuing their cultural practices. In some cases this policy was pursued so vehemently that it resulted in generations that had lost, and sometimes even rejected, African-based lifestyles or practices. The descendants of Indian plantation workers, who had more cultural freedom, have retained a relatively strong sense of identity and history. The Jamaica Memory Bank has therefore focussed particularly on the Afro-Caribbean heritage.

¹⁶ 'Oral history methodology: the life history approach', Chew D., in *Oral History in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, 1998, p.53

¹⁷ *Listening for a Change*, Slim H. and Thompson P., Panos, London, 1993, pp.36-41

... Each of the island's 14 parishes has a co-ordinator, and the interviewing is carried out by a network of volunteers, trained by a team of professional researchers. Materials collected in the field range from tape-recorded interviews to videos, artefacts, photographs and manuscripts. After a copy has been taken for the Memory Bank, the original interview cassette is stored in the National Library in Kingston. ...

The interviews range from single-topic discussion to whole life stories. By 1986 some 80 elderly Jamaicans had been interviewed. Seventy per cent were over 80 and 25% of those were 100 or older; about 20% of those interviewed had died by 1986.

In addition to the interviews, about 1,500 songs had been taped, and ceremonies, celebrations and other activities of about 20 groups had been photographed, taped or filmed.

The material at the Memory Bank is carefully documented and analysed for the information it contains, for example, cultural, practical, scientific, botanical, linguistic or medical. Indexing and classifying such wide-ranging material has proved complicated, and the fact that the end uses vary makes the task even more difficult - the needs of a development practitioner, an academic researcher, a tourist organisation, the mass media, a lay person or a teacher are all different. Cross-referencing, while seen as essential, is also time-consuming, since a life story may contain brief but illuminating references to multiple topics.

In 1990 and 1993, as part of an expansion of activities and a focus on the research aspect, the Memory Bank got funding from HelpAge International specifically to provide interviewing equipment and training to older people. The aim was to involve them more in the running of the project ... [and] their own knowledge of the past and the locality would help in the field research.

While the Memory Bank has a clear archival role, it was also conceived as having an important developmental function. ... 'In this region where so much relating to the lives and thinking of the people has been written from the observer's rather than the insider's point of view, a project such as the Memory Bank could redress the balance.'

Obviously, there are very many difficulties in making independent archives for Burma's communities, not least concerning where such materials could be stored. However, if one considers the total amount of material recorded by the Memory Bank during this 10 year period, it could quite realistically be preserved on a relatively small number of floppy discs, CDs or zip drives. Another important point to note from this example concerns the contribution that elderly members of the community were asked to make to ensure the success of the project.

Essentially, anyone can create their own archive of materials. It does not have to take place on such a co-ordinated and grand scale as that of the Jamaican Memory Bank project. If such collection and archiving can take place however, on whatever scale, it will enable future generations to gain access to aspects of their cultural past which may otherwise not be accessible to them. Such collection does not have to be done hurriedly, in a matter of weeks or months. The Jamaican Memory Bank Project interviewed 80 people in five years - it is not a huge number, but the work was done carefully and thoroughly.

We have now considered a number of different uses to which oral sources can be put. Before considering some specific issues relating to the recording of oral history and oral traditions, we shall consider some of the basic issues that it is necessary to consider if you are considering developing any kind of oral research project. We shall then consider some of the practical aspects of putting your project into effect, such as interview and recording techniques and training.

Pt 4 - LISTENING PROJECTS

Designing and Developing a Project

- Planning your project
- Examples of Listening Projects 1-3

Reviewing, Monitoring and Evaluating Your Project

- Cultural difficulties in reviewing and monitoring
- Why review?
- Review points for Listening Projects
- Why monitor and evaluate?

Writing a Proposal and Making Funding Applications

- Outline of key points to be included in funding proposals

The Role of the Project Co-ordinator

Case Study of an Oral Testimony Project

DESIGNING AND DEVELOPING A PROJECT

Planning your project¹⁸

In the early stages of developing your project it is useful to consider the following: **aims** and **objectives**, **practicalities**, and **outputs** and **activities**.

Aims and objectives

1. Do you intend to record oral tradition(s) or oral histories/testimonies?
2. What is the **purpose** of making the recordings? For example, are you attempting to **record aspects of social/cultural/economic/environmental change**? Is the primary purpose simply to **document experiences and events** for the narrator and the community or is it for some other purpose?
3. Does the project have the **support and interest of the communities involved**, including the proposed use of the materials?
4. Is the purpose to **communicate the testimonies** to a wide audience as well as to the local community(ies)?

Practicalities

1. **Sensitivity** - how open will you be able to be about what you are doing and how will that affect your project?
2. **Time frame** - you must ensure that adequate time is allowed to achieve what you want to achieve. If you are uncertain how long it may take, it is a good idea to include a **review** period after a few weeks/months so that you can reconsider some of your earlier goals and assumptions if necessary.
3. **Budgets** and **Voluntary Contributions** - you will need to consider the cost of any equipment you might need to buy, any travel expenses and gifts, fees/presents for the interviewers if that is necessary, expenses/payments for the co-ordinator and for transcription and translation if that is an extra requirement. You will also need to work out the possible costs of any transfer of materials to

¹⁸ Much of the text for this section has been either taken directly or adapted from *Giving Voice*, Panos, London, 1999

other formats and for any other products from the project. At the end of this you will probably feel that the total amount is way too high for your budget (even if, that is, you have one at all). In that case, start very simply and try to utilise people who are willing to participate simply from interest. However, you need to think about how to motivate and encourage your volunteers - make sure that efforts are made to keep the goodwill and enthusiasm of volunteers high, to respect the efforts that they make, to involve them in the development of the work and to treat them as **your most valuable asset**.

4. **Storage** - you will need to think ahead about where and how you are going to store the materials to ensure that they are both secure and kept in good condition
5. **Contacts** - if possible, try to make contact with other groups and organisations (if you are based in Thailand) who have already done this kind of work and can assist you from the very beginning
6. **Control** - if you are reliant on one particular funder, for example a wealthy businessman from your community, ensure that the principles of the project as a **community based** endeavour are agreed to and that lines of communication between funders, organisers, co-ordinators, volunteers and other workers are clear. If you receive funds from other sources, ensure that you review, monitor and evaluate your project and keep the funder informed of progress with regular updates.

Outputs and activities

You will need to think from the outset about the uses that the participating community and/or organisation wish to make of the recordings, in case they have implications for the way that you work. Remember, too, that narrators should have as much information as possible about the project and the ways in which their stories may be communicated. Broadly speaking, these could be for **advocacy, education, documentation, and/or communication**. Here are some examples that have been used elsewhere:

- ◆ Using the interviews or extracts of interviews, in written or taped versions, in community discussion groups
- ◆ Using the interviews or extracts to raise public awareness of a particular situation/experience
- ◆ Using people's first-hand experience as evidence to lobby for better or different policies
- ◆ Recording changing and/or disappearing working and/or social practices

- ◆ Documenting community history and/or indigenous knowledge and traditions
- ◆ Developing community authored literacy materials

To achieve these, a project might do all or any of the following:

- ◆ Publish a community booklet(s)
- ◆ Set up an exhibition
- ◆ Make, or contribute to a radio programme
- ◆ Establish a small archive or contribute to an existing museum/documentation centre
- ◆ Organise meetings of involved parties (including policy makers) to discuss the findings
- ◆ Put on a drama based on the testimonies

Think about how these anticipated activities may affect how you do your project. If you want to make radio programmes, for example, you *might* need access to broadcast quality recorders. If you want to produce an illustrated booklet or set up an exhibition, you might want to get pictures of the narrators as the interviews are gathered. In many cases you might think it is desirable to accompany a text with a video and/or photographic record - for example, when oral traditions are being recorded as part of a performance. Again, always make sure that the narrators are happy for their contribution to be featured in such plans.

Here are examples of the aims and objectives of three projects. The first is a real example from South Africa (oral testimony), the second and third are examples of projects that are typical of those that many groups from Burma are interested in developing (both oral tradition and history/ testimony).

Example 1: An Oral Testimony Project in South Africa

In this project from **South Africa**, the overall aim is to increase understanding and awareness of the impacts of resettlement by listening to the views and experiences of those who have experienced it first-hand. This project in South Africa focused on individuals who had been relocated as a result of development policies (in this case by a multi-million dollar water supply project in Southern Africa) and to explore less visible and more long-term effects, especially social and cultural.

Project Aims

- ◆ To increase understanding and awareness of the impacts of resettlement
- ◆ To contribute towards improving settlement policy and practice
- ◆ To provide an outlet for the voices of the marginalised communities and individuals whose views and experiences are key to greater understanding of the process and effects of displacement
- ◆ To establish widespread understanding of the value of oral testimony collection as a means of accessing the views and experiences of individuals and communities experiencing resettlement

Project Objectives

- ◆ To train a team of interviewers in oral testimony collection
- ◆ To interview villagers prior to, and at one and two yearly intervals after relocation
- ◆ Where appropriate, to assist the displaced in their adaptation to new circumstances, by providing opportunities to reflect on their experience and articulate concerns and priorities
- ◆ To produce an illustrated booklet based on the testimonies, primarily for the villagers themselves
- ◆ To produce and disseminate a second booklet and/or information outputs (in local/national language(s)) based on the testimonies, accompanied by background information and appropriate analysis, to serve as a stimulus to discussion and debate among those involved in the process of resettlement
- ◆ To use testimony collection (process and product) to encourage dialogue between those displaced and the NGOs, implementing agencies and government parties involved

Example 2: An Oral Tradition Project in a Minority Community from Burma

In the following example, the overall aim is to develop materials on oral traditions to increase community awareness of these forms that are disappearing, to encourage further recording, and to make a contribution to the literary and lexical development of the dominant local language. It also seeks to engage members of different generations of the community in producing a good quality text that will enhance community self-esteem.

Project Aims

- ◆ To increase understanding and awareness of a particular form of oral tradition in the community
- ◆ To enhance the status and appreciation of oral traditions linguistically and culturally
- ◆ To encourage the further recording of such traditions
- ◆ To give momentum to local community endeavours to record and make archives of all aspects of the community's culture that are deemed vulnerable

Project Objectives

- ◆ To train members of the community in basic computing skills to input transcripts and prepare a text for publication
- ◆ To establish links between different generations of the community in the preparation of materials for publication
- ◆ To encourage young designers and artists from the community to become engaged in the illustration of the materials
- ◆ To create a text that provides a linguistic and cultural introduction to an oral tradition that few members of the younger generation will have seen/heard performed
- ◆ To generate interest in the linguistic vigour of oral tradition and its corpus of lexis to enhance perceptions of its status and to preserve a record; to encourage the lexical development of the modern language; to develop a text book for use by younger members of the community
- ◆ To discuss the social philosophy and religious beliefs evidenced by the tradition as an affirmation of a distinct cultural identity
- ◆ To enhance community self esteem through the publication of a high quality work
- ◆ To sell the text commercially to raise funds for further recording and publication

Example 3: An Oral History Project in a Minority Community from Burma

In the following example from a Burmese minority community in Thailand, the objective is to record oral histories with the purpose of writing a history of the community in Burmese and in English.

Project Aims

- ◆ To produce a text on the history of the community, particularly detailing the political situation of the community since Independence, both as a record and also to publicise the community's situation for a wider audience
- ◆ To address the lack of documentation of the community and to counter-act the effects of politicised national history which presents the community 'inaccurately'
- ◆ To encourage community self-esteem and to show respect to the experience and knowledge of elders within the community by recording and publishing their words

Project Objectives

- ◆ To form a committee to supervise the development of the project and later activities
- ◆ To train committee members in the recording of oral histories
- ◆ To record elite members of the community with information about recent political events and to use these histories with other source materials in the writing of a history book
- ◆ To enhance community identity and self-esteem through the book and to redress the inaccuracies of the 'official' history
- ◆ The book to be used as a text book in community schools
- ◆ To make known to a wider audience the situation and experience of the community
- ◆ To provide a means of training committee members in the process of publishing; to provide an ongoing momentum to the publication of further works on the history of the community which the committee will oversee.

As you can see, the aims and the objectives of each of these projects are somewhat different. It is not the case that there is a right way and a wrong way to go about your work - but you do need to work out clearly before you start what it is that you are hoping to achieve.

REVIEWING, MONITORING AND EVALUATING YOUR PROJECT

Working out in some detail what you are intending to do only solves part of the problem of running your project. You will also need to check that the project progresses as you intend it to. To do this, you must regularly **review** and **monitor** your project - and sessions for doing this should be included in your project plan from the beginning. Reviewing and monitoring will help you to ensure that you are achieving what you set out to achieve, to consider what you are doing in the light of recent experiences, to assess your progress, to solve problems and to ensure that you are ready to move ahead to the next stage, or to develop further work. Reviewing and monitoring will also help you to evaluate your project at the end.

It is particularly important in cases where the group running the project is relatively inexperienced that they should have opportunities to review what they have done. When people are working together as a small unit, and many of them are very familiar with each other and see each other regularly in the village etc., it may seem unnecessary to meet more formally to discuss such issues. It is, however, a good idea to have more 'formal' meetings occasionally. Problems will inevitably arise - sometimes relating to the interviewing skills of a particular interviewer or to the types of questions that are being asked - and these problems need to be considered and resolved to ensure that enthusiasm for the project is kept high among interviewers and in the wider community. When a project starts to get a bad reputation, possibly because of the conduct of an interviewer or the intrusive nature of some of the questions, very quickly you may find that people will not want to participate. Furthermore, if the project is dependant on volunteers, it is easy for people to lose enthusiasm and for their effort to wither away if they are not supported and encouraged, sometimes without anyone really noticing before it is too late. This is particularly the case when much of the work is non-intensive, extending over many months, and the results of the project seem difficult to quantify and are slow to realise.

Cultural difficulties in reviewing, monitoring and evaluating a project

The techniques outlined in this section of the manual are not usually used by groups from Burma, and the ideas presented here may seem inappropriate to many. 'Review' may be interpreted as 'criticism', leading to resentment amongst those who feel that they are being 'criticised'. Although such activities need to be undertaken primarily to ensure that the work is being done appropriately, there are also financial considerations in monitoring and evaluating your project, which will become clear - and these aspects may provoke even more resentment. It is typically the case that when local sponsorship or funding is given - from a wealthy businessman or a group representing the community - it takes the form more of a 'donation' than a 'budget'. It is given with few questions asked and little involvement or monitoring from the funder. In this situation, money can disappear in an apparently bottomless pit - when the money runs out, another request for help will be made, and will usually be responded to positively because otherwise the original funder will lose face if the local community assumes that they can no longer support the work. Ultimately, the effects of this kind of 'donation' tend to be negative, both financially and in terms of project planning and achievement of objectives. However, if you or your group are hoping to make applications to outside organisations for funding, it is very important

that you can show how you will account for the money given, and can ensure that it will be used responsibly. Although it is almost impossible to draw up concrete budget plans in some cases, especially where kyat/dollar rates are an issue as they may be in relation to the use of imported items in Burma (computer supplies, high quality paper for publishing etc.), it is far better to modify your aims and objectives to suit your budget rather than believe that funds will be provided to match your needs. Some organisations are willing to consider funding Burma-related projects but they do not do so because of concerns about financial planning, accountability and the products that result. **You can significantly improve your chances of funding if you can show a genuine awareness and responsibility towards issues such as reviewing, monitoring and evaluating your project.** Ultimately however, reviewing, monitoring and evaluating your project will help your work to be more successful, whether or not you receive money from outside sources - and it is a good idea to consider how these ideas could be incorporated to improve the work that you are hoping to do.

Why review?

Reviewing

Having a review session(s) mid-way or at intervals during the project should be part of the monitoring and evaluation process, but it will also provide an opportunity:

- ◆ To assess progress in terms of interviews/recordings completed, and transcribed if necessary, both for quantity and quality
- ◆ To give interviewers a chance to share experiences, discuss problems, and for the group and/or co-ordinator to give feedback and support
- ◆ To see whether adjustments need to be made to the project in terms of the range of subjects covered, the nature of the recordings, etc., that the information about the narrator and/or the performance/interview and interviewer is being recorded as intended, that transcriptions of material are being made appropriately
- ◆ To consider which people might need to be interviewed again, either because something interesting has emerged or because the first attempt missed important opportunities
- ◆ To assess whether some interviewers are having particular difficulties and to whom it might be best to give other responsibilities within the project

Below are some points that could be considered in your review sessions, depending on the kind of materials that you are recording - oral histories/testimonies and/or oral traditions.

Review Points for Oral Testimony Interview Techniques

1. Are there leading questions (does the question suggest the answer?)
2. Is more than one point/query raised by the same question?
3. Are there too many questions which get the answer 'yes'/'no'/'I don't know'?
4. Does the interviewer have to repeat any questions in a different way? If so, why?
5. Are some questions too vague to understand?
6. Are some questions too difficult/complicated to understand?
7. Are there good follow-up/probing questions?
8. Does the interviewer appear to be influenced/interrupted by a) the interviewer, b) onlookers?
9. Does the interviewer allow the narrator to speak on a different subject to the question? Was this productive/helpful?
10. Does the interview flow well or does it jump confusingly from one subject to another?
11. Does the interviewer allow enough time for the narrator to answer fully?
12. Does the interviewer show interest in the answers?
13. Does the narrator appear to be enjoying the interview?

Review Points for Oral Testimony Interview Content

1. To what extent does the interview cover the subjects or topics discussed/anticipated?
2. Have new themes/areas of interest emerged from the interview?
3. Are there any good stories/anecdotes/jokes/proverbs within the interview?
4. What did you learn from the interview that you didn't know?
5. What value might this have?
6. Did any information give you greater understanding of an issue or practice?
7. Was there enough detail to be useful?
8. Is a follow-up interview needed?

Review Points for Oral Tradition Performance/Recordings

1. What particular problems have there been in recording relating to the nature of the tradition being performed?
2. How was the issue of turning over tapes in the middle of the performance negotiated? Did the performer agree to break while tapes were changed or were sections missed - on purpose or by accident?
3. What other materials will be necessary to make the recording understandable to those who listen at a later date? Transcript? Translation into a modern idiom? Are there issues of accent/dialect etc. that need to be addressed?
4. Are any changes necessary to the recording situation and recording environment?
5. Did the performer feel that s/he could respond to the recording situation positively? What problems did they express about what they were doing?
6. To what extent did the audience/onlookers influence the performance? Was it necessary to have an audience? Were onlookers encouraged to respond to the performance or were they told to remain quiet or sent away? What effects did this have?
7. What did you learn about this performer's knowledge and experience? Did anything surprising emerge? Are more recordings necessary?
8. Have arrangements been made for follow-up with the performer to enable them to provide a commentary or to discuss his/her performance and to listen to the tapes?

Review Points for Oral History Interview Techniques

1. What techniques were used to elicit information - life maps, photographs etc. - and how successful were they in eliciting information?
2. How forthcoming was the speaker? How much time did they allow for the interview? Are they willing to be interviewed again?
3. Who was present at the interview? How did this affect what was said?
4. Did any subjects prove difficult and/or distressing for the speaker? How were these problems resolved? Was there any resentment about the kind of information that was being requested? What subjects did the speaker enjoy speaking about?
5. Did the speaker express any concerns about comments s/he made about certain subjects/people and the way that the recording material might be used in the

future? How were these issues resolved? Did the speaker say anything surprising or unexpected?

6. How reliable do you think the speaker is? In what ways was the speaker giving information with an audience in mind? To what extent did it seem that the speaker was self-censoring?
7. Are follow-up interviews necessary and what arrangements have been made for this? What is the availability of the speaker for follow-up?
8. What kind of cross-checking can take place on what was said?
9. Is the speaker later likely to object to the conditions of use that have been agreed?

Why monitor and evaluate?

What is monitoring and evaluation?

The terms *monitoring* and *evaluation* (M + E) are sometimes used together without distinguishing between them. Clearly the two are linked; it would be hard to evaluate a project effectively if you had not monitored certain aspects or activities during the course of the work. Take, for example, a project which aimed to raise the awareness of local NGOs about a certain issue. The monitoring should have identified, among other things, the number of NGOs which attended a workshop and/or received the information generated by the project etc., while the evaluation could involve interviewing individuals and groups about their reaction to/use of this information. If those involved had also been surveyed at the beginning of the project to assess their awareness of the issue at that time, you would then have some data with which to judge the extent to which your objective had been met. Thus the two processes complement each other. Nevertheless, the list below outlines some helpful distinctions which may help you plan your M + E activities.

Monitoring

- ◆ Part of project management, and takes place at different stages throughout the project's duration, e.g.: the mid-term review
- ◆ May be mostly done by project co-ordinator
- ◆ Tends to be more factual and focused on tangible objectives, e.g.: the number of testimonies gathered, etc.

Evaluation

- ◆ Part of the final assessment of the project, examining the extent aims and objectives have been met
- ◆ Requires feedback from a range of people involved in the project
- ◆ Needs to be participatory because it involves people's subjective opinions and perspectives

How to do monitoring and evaluation

What you monitor and evaluate will obviously reflect the specific aims and objectives of your particular project. The clearer a project's aims and objectives, the easier they will be to monitor and evaluate. Thinking about M + E at this first stage may even help clarify the ambitions of the project. In brief, though, evaluation of an oral testimony/history/traditions project should explore both the **processes** used and the **products** that result. Thus you might wish to build in M + E at the following stages:

- ◆ Project design and planning
- ◆ Any training that may be involved
- ◆ Recording and collection (using the midway review)
- ◆ Transcribing, translating, summarising, storing the material
- ◆ Disseminating your findings and project 'products'
- ◆ Overall impact of the project

As previously stated, the midway review can be a crucial stage in project M + E. It is an opportunity not only to monitor progress, but also a chance for interviewers to discuss and reflect upon the recording and collection process, and for any necessary adjustments to be made.

Quantitative targets and indicators

In designing your project, it will also help to include some quantitative targets - i.e.: those for which you can see concrete results which can on some level be calculated. Monitoring these is part of general project management. Here are some examples:

- ◆ The number of people receiving training during the project
- ◆ The number of recordings 1) made, 2) transcribed, 3) summarised, 4) catalogued and/or archived (if appropriate), 5) translated (if appropriate)
- ◆ Number of copies sold or requests for copies to be distributed

Methods for monitoring

- ◆ Questionnaires and/or regular meetings and discussions with project participants
- ◆ Keeping good records

Questionnaires can be problematic, especially when people are not familiar with giving this kind of feedback. However, meetings and less formal discussions are an excellent and simple way of obtaining feedback.

Qualitative aims and objectives

Consultation with those involved in the project is the key to measuring qualitative objectives. It is virtually impossible to 'measure' an objective such as 'to empower participating communities to set their own agenda for social change and development' without participatory discussion and reflection with those involved. As a guide, the following groups should be consulted to obtain their feedback and opinions on different aspects of the project:

- ◆ Interviewers /recorders and narrators
- ◆ Community representatives
- ◆ Staff from any organisation involved
- ◆ People and organisations which have received the various outputs of the project

Depending on you project, you may find addressing some of the following questions helpful in assessing the more qualitative aspects:

- ◆ To what extent did the initial outlines of the project match what actually happened?

- ◆ To what extent was it possible to produce the follow-up products/activities that were anticipated?
- ◆ How has the project been developed since? What was the feedback like that was received from all those involved with the project?

WRITING A PROPOSAL & MAKING FUNDING APPLICATIONS

Many groups from Burma are interested in developing oral history and oral tradition projects with the intention of publishing some of the materials. This section will consider how a proposal can be developed for this kind of project, which could then be submitted as a funding application. If you are interested in other kinds of work not related to publishing, the principles outlined here can nevertheless be adapted to suit your needs. It is a sad but true fact that it is very difficult to get funding for work such as this, but if you want to apply for funding, whether from a foreign grant-making organisation or from a wealthy business person in your community, there are some points to bear in mind that will help you to present your request as positively as possible.

There are a number of reasons why people are ***unlikely to provide funds***, even if they support the kind of work that you want to do. Among the most important of these negative reasons are:

- ◆ **Lack of detail** about the project costs and how the work will be broken down into reasonable - and assessable - stages
- ◆ **Unrealistic project outcomes** - it is particularly common for people to claim that they will achieve a huge amount in a short time, which anyone can see is unrealistic, and suggests that the project has not been well thought out
- ◆ **Insufficient monitoring and accountability**, both in terms of the money requested and the outcomes, leading funders to fear that money will be wasted or will 'disappear' without anything concrete to show for the money
- ◆ **Insufficient accountability** for what will happen to funds that might arise as a result of the project outcomes - will any **profits** be used for future research or for personal profit?
- ◆ The aims and objectives are **too vague**
- ◆ **Insufficient evidence** that the project has the support of the local community - e.g.: it may be the idea of only one or two community members who have made no real effort to get community ideas and responses.

Outline of key points to be included in funding proposals

Background to the project

- ◆ How did the project and any committee/group presenting it come into being?
- ◆ What is the context of the project - culturally, politically, historically etc.?
- ◆ Brief chronology of work conducted thus far and relevant bibliographical information about project organisers
- ◆ Details of other community members and organisations and outside groups who are involved with or interested in the work and give it their support. Most funders would rather give money to groups of people rather than individuals to ensure better accountability.

The aims and objectives of the project

- ◆ Details of the work proposed
- ◆ Outline of aim and objectives. **Training** objectives are particularly attractive to some funders, as are **environmental** or **educational** objectives to others. Do your homework and find out as much as possible about the funder
- ◆ Reasons for attempting to record the kinds of materials suggested, and their suitability for the proposed project outcomes

The nature of the publication (or other product/activity)

- ◆ The overall structure of the book and how the recordings relate to it
- ◆ The anticipated size of the publication - number of pages, size, paper quality
- ◆ The anticipated audience. How much will it cost and is this a reasonable amount for the market you want to sell it to?
- ◆ The number of photographs (colour / B&W ?) and illustrations (maps, diagrams etc.) and the reason for their inclusion
- ◆ The format of the text
 1. Is it necessary to publish complete recordings or extracts?
 2. How will the text to be organised?
 3. Will the publication be understandable to the people for which it is designed e.g.: in which language will it be written; will translations or commentary be given? How can this be guaranteed (see above)?
- ◆ Will the text be read by other community members (and others) for their criticism and comments before publication? Who?

Distribution Of The Text

- ◆ How many books will be published? What revenue do you expect to receive?
- ◆ How will the book be distributed? Give names of people you have spoken to about this and any evidence of support. Give details of which organisations will take books for distribution and how many they will take.
- ◆ How will the revenue from the sales be collected?
- ◆ To what purpose will revenue from the sales be put?

Publishing Details

- ◆ Details of the procedure by which the publisher has been/will be selected, including -
 1. evidence that more than one publisher has been approached - details should be given comparing costs
 2. detailed reasons why the particular publisher chosen was selected, balancing cost and quality
- ◆ A fully itemised copy of the projected publishing costs

Conclusion

- Why the funding body is being asked for money. Why is it unavailable from other places / people especially if it has the support of the community?
- The unique nature of the project and the material
- An overall evaluation of the value of the project for the community and re-statement of objectives

Pay particular attention to the following:

Time scale

- ◆ Break your project down into manageable stages, allowing adequate time for each to be completed, including monitoring and evaluation, before moving on to the next

Costs

- ◆ Itemise your project costs in as much detail as possible. Vague categories like 'Travel', 'Expenses', 'Publishing' are unlikely to persuade funders that you have seriously thought through the costs of your project and will be accountable for them
- ◆ Any evidence of the community or other organizations providing some financial support in addition to what is being requested will be viewed positively

Review, monitoring, evaluation and accountability

- ◆ How can you assure the funder that all of the above needs are being taken seriously in your project - be as specific as possible about WHEN reviews etc. will be made, and by whom. How will you feed back your conclusions to the funders? How will you ensure the financial accountability of your project?

THE ROLE OF THE PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR

Having established your aims and objectives, it is important to clarify who will be involved and what their roles will be, if this hasn't been worked out already. It is best to appoint one person with the overall role of co-ordination and implementation. This person may or may not also be an interviewer/narrator. Essential qualities for a co-ordinator are: **organisational ability**, **enthusiasm** and genuine **commitment** to the project, good **local contacts**, and good **communication skills**. Previous experience is ideal, but is not essential.

However, although the effectiveness of the co-ordinator can be crucial to the project's progress, over-reliance on one person can also be dangerous. Projects may run for several years and it can be a problem if one person becomes the main focus for everything that goes on. Ideally, there should be a broad commitment to the project within the institution or community concerned, and the co-ordinator should ensure that others are briefed well enough to take on his/her role should they leave. Nonetheless, it is essential that on a day to day basis one person is responsible for ensuring everything is done, including on-going monitoring, and keeping up the momentum.

Broadly speaking, the role of the co-ordinator should be:

1. To do some initial research to identify what form the project should take
2. To plan and organise training
3. Draw up a budget and timetable for work
4. Look after distribution of equipment, expenses etc.
5. Provide support for interviewers etc.
6. Monitor progress and hold review meetings
7. Supervise transcription and, if necessary, organise translation
8. Supervise follow-up activities

Case Study: Why an immunisation programme failed to make its mark on women: Somalia - Anna LaFond⁴⁰

In 1978 the government of Somalia embarked upon an Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI). The Somali programme was one of many national initiatives started at that time, part of the global strategy supported by UNICEF and other donors which seeks to achieve universal child immunisation by the year 2000. The EPI programme aims to immunise all children under five against the six killer diseases: diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, measles and TB. It also aims to immunise all women of child-bearing age against tetanus to minimise neo-natal deaths of mothers and children. Large-scale immunisation programmes are relatively complicated to administer, involving multiple doses of vaccines and follow-up visits spread over a period of several months.

In 1985 a renewed drive for immunisation got under way and three successive campaigns were held throughout Somalia. These mobilised all levels of government staff and party cadres, but the methods to ensure compliance were often extreme. The Save the Children Fund (UK) team which studied the immunisation programme recorded that 'mothers refusing immunisation were threatened with fines or imprisonment, and health staff also exerted consistent pressure on the community, actively seeking out children whose mothers failed to attend.'⁴¹ The campaigns brought about a dramatic increase in coverage: from an estimated 15% to 79% in Mogadishu by 1987, and from 7% to 76% in Hargeisa. When the campaigns ended, however, coverage fell back. While access to immunisation had improved, demand was very low: mothers simply did not present their children or themselves for immunisation. By 1989, immunisation coverage for some diseases in Somalia had dropped back to around 25%.

At this point the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Save the Children Fund (SCF) teamed up to study the falling demand and try to find out more about why women in particular seemed to be having problems with accepting immunisation. Their research culminated in a report entitled 'A study of immunisation acceptability in Somalia'.⁴² The main part of the research involved the collection of oral testimony, an unusual approach for an official report. Its 88 pages contain 94 passages of testimony, in which people describe in their own words their views and experience of immunisation.

⁴⁰ The case study is taken from *Listening for a Change*, Panos, London, 1993, pp.95-103

⁴¹ LaFond A., 'The history of immunisation in Somalia from a community perspective,' paper presented to the National Life Story Collection's Conference on Oral History and Development, London, November 1991

⁴² LaFond A., 'A study of immunisation acceptability in Somalia,' Save the Children Fund (UK), April 1990. This report and the paper cited above are the source for all the information and quotes in this case study.

The main objective of the study was 'to determine the factors which contribute to immunisation acceptance, and to understand the influence of these factors on health-seeking behaviour.' An important secondary objective was to ensure that the study's findings could be easily understood and taken up by the MoH managers and staff at all levels. It was felt that ministry staff needed some clear messages from the study with which to redirect their programme, rather than a mass of complex data and statistics.

Methodology

To meet the two main objectives, an oral testimony approach was decided upon. Researchers would explore people's attitudes and behaviour by talking and listening to them; in turn, it was hoped that the testimonies would convey the key issues surrounding immunisation acceptability in an accessible form. **The study team selected four communities**, two rural and two urban, and devised a methodology involving focus group discussions, interviews with key informants and observation. The research took a deliberately historical perspective and sought to gauge people's experience of immunisation over the 11 year period of 1978-1989.

The focus groups brought together **between six and ten** people of 'like characteristics' in age, sex, and socio-economic status. **A total of 25 focus group discussions were held.** There were three main types of group: mothers (of three different age groups); Ministry of Health staff; and traditional healers and birth attendants. Discussions with mothers were held in the home of one of the participants at an acceptable time, while those with MoH staff were conducted in the clinic after working hours.

Interviews were also held on a **one-to-one** basis with 'key individuals in the community who were in some way associated with the immunisation programme.' These included government officials, local representatives of the Somali Women's Democratic Organisation, and government health staff. Key informants were also identified in the community. These included opinion formers and those who advise mothers and influence health beliefs and practice, such as traditional healers and birth attendants, religious leaders (sheikhs and teachers of the Qur'an), grandmothers and fathers. These interviews were undertaken so as to 'reveal the broader community dynamics of decision-making, and further explore the ideas expressed in the group discussions.' **Seventy seven interviews** of this kind were held, **lasting for between one and three hours**, as did most of the focus group discussions.

The final method of research was simple **observation**. Members of the MoH/SCF team observed vaccination sessions at immunisation sites as well as the curative practices of traditional healers, paying particular attention to the interaction between the various players in each environment.

Field work lasted 12 weeks. The interviews and moderating of focus group discussions were carried out in Somali by a team of two: a male community health nurse connected to the EPI programme and a woman graduate from the MoH statistics department. Both underwent a three week training programme, during which guidelines were drawn up for group discussions and the one-to-one interviews. These were tested and refined in a pilot study, as a result of which the main topics to be explored emerged as follows:

- ◆ Awareness and knowledge of immunisation
- ◆ Attitudes towards the characteristics of immunisation
- ◆ Safety, effectiveness, accessibility and cost
- ◆ Perceptions of vaccine-preventable diseases
- ◆ Perceptions and practices related to prevention
- ◆ Perceptions of methods of immunisation promotion and delivery
- ◆ General attitudes towards health services
- ◆ The role of health advice

Listening to mothers

The discussions and testimony produced a wide range of testimony. Mothers represented a significant proportion of those interviewed and they spoke of their experience of and attitudes to immunisation. They also described their own beliefs about prevention and protection, which are so central to the concept of vaccination. Many mothers revealed that they had different perceptions of the six diseases: the cause of measles was a mystery, it seemed to be 'in the air', so preventing it by immunisation was regarded as no more and no less appropriate than any other approach. By contrast, diseases such as diphtheria and neo-natal tetanus were seen as caused primarily by spiritual forces and therefore were more appropriately dealt with by traditional healers.

The mothers also voiced their anxieties about what they saw as the dangers of immunisation, and their views on which vaccines seemed to work best. Many women spoke with passion about the way in which the EPI programme had been promoted, often by force, and about their fears that immunisation would affect their fertility. They told of how they respected the advice received from family, friends and traditional healers more than that which came from the MoH clinics, in which they lacked confidence.

The majority of women were well aware that immunisation has a preventive purpose, often explaining that it is used 'to go before' an illness, and very few confused immunisation with curative treatment. ... Because disease was seen to come and go as a result of God's will, the implication was that it could not be predicted or prevented other than by God. This belief undermined the notion of medical prevention as people only concerned themselves with a disease once it had arrived, and doubted the power of drugs to fend off what God ordains. One traditional healer explained:

The advice I give to mothers for themselves and for their children's health problems is not that of prevention but of treatment, because only Allah knows what is coming. And also we are not giving advice about something which does not yet exist.

Women's testimony revealed that most had received and understood the information that immunisation is targeted at children under five, and at women between 15 and 45. But many were not aware that the protection provided by immunisation lasts for life, neither had they been fully informed over the years about the side effects of vaccination, such as fever, stiffening and aching. They were therefore repeatedly alarmed by these symptoms, which seriously undermined their faith in immunisation and were to them an indication of there being more dangers than benefits in vaccination.

It became obvious that this lack of communication stemmed from the way that many of the early EPI campaigns had been promoted - by force and with minimal explanation. ... Women explained how concern at the side effects developed into rumours about the tetanus vaccine given to women of child-bearing age. Once again, because insufficient information was given, people were left to draw their own conclusions and many became convinced that the purpose of the tetanus vaccine was to stop population growth rather than to prevent tetanus:

In the first place, they told us the younger mothers should come and be immunised and we started asking ourselves questions. Why are they looking for young mothers? Because they are producing children, that's why they give it. The people said once you get immunised you won't be pregnant for four years, so they ran.

Grandmothers confirmed these rumours and often admitted to being the source of them: 'An old lady like me will stand in the line at the clinic and will say to her - you will lose your menstruation and the baby. What can they do? They will run.'

Changing attitudes

The women also revealed how their attitudes evolved over the years, as some of their anxieties and suspicions were allayed by experience, if not by improved information from health staff. Women who were immunised against tetanus did get pregnant and children who had been immunised against measles did not get measles. ...

Following this change in attitude, women stressed that some of the continuing reluctance to come forward was due more to inconvenience than fear of side-effects or sterilisation or lack of confidence in the effectiveness of vaccinations. For many, immunisation was impractical and time-consuming. ...

But a further factor was the women's lack of confidence in the MoH clinics, rather than in immunisation itself. Because clinics were so poorly equipped and staff so unsympathetic when providing curative services, women felt no incentive to take their children there on a routine basis and so opportunities for immunisation diminished. ...

The information MoH staff gave out, especially about immunisation, was also considered grudging and inadequate. Not surprisingly mothers had more confidence in traditional healers, sheikhs, pharmacies, private doctors, and known and trusted friends and relatives. It was to these people that they turned for most of their information and advice about immunisation, child-birth and child health. ...

Recommendations

After listening to the many people interviewed in the study, MoH and SCF staff were able to recommend major changes in the national immunisation programme. And the first thing the new approach emphasised was the importance of information: any new EPI initiatives should be based on 'education rather than compliance'. Health education activities had to be designed that recognised the prevailing notions of disease prevention, and included mothers and key opinion formers such as traditional healers, birth attendants, older women and religious leaders.

At field level, supervisors and health workers began to tailor their messages to meet the gaps in women's knowledge and to discuss immunisation in the context of their religious beliefs surrounding protection and prevention. ... Finally, the report stressed that if modern medicine and immunisation programmes were to be credible to people, the curative services of local clinics and of mother and child health centres would have to be improved. As long as mothers perceived these as ineffectual and uncooperative, immunisation campaigns which were centred around those services would be seen in a similar light and be undermined by association. ...

The results

As Somalia tragically descended into civil war in the months following the study, it has not been possible to assess the impact of the changes to the EPI strategy, and it is now impossible to estimate how successful the changes might have been. Nonetheless, the study is important as a demonstration of how the collection of oral testimony can reveal crucial and previously unrecognised perspectives on a particular issue. The words of the Somali women were lucid and direct. They represent the firm voice of experience and provide a counterpoint to the uncertain assumptions of other people speculating on their behalf. ... The improved understanding of the perceptions and experiences which influence the take-up of immunisation provided a more solid starting point for redesigning the information, education and extension components of the EPI programme, and for respecting and involving women much more fully throughout the whole process.

Pt 5 - HOW TO LISTEN

Selecting & Training Interviewers for Listening Projects

- Selecting interviewers for Listening Projects
- Training interviewers for Oral Testimony projects
- Role Play
- Planning training sessions
- Planning the fieldwork
- Selecting narrators for Oral Testimony projects

Issues in Interviewing on Oral History Projects

- Case study - interviewing élites

Issues in Interviewing on Oral Tradition Projects

Types of Interview

Asking Questions

Interview Prompts

The Interview and the Recording

- Key points: oral history and oral testimony interviews and recordings
- Oral tradition audio and visual recordings

SELECTING & TRAINING INTERVIEWERS FOR LISTENING PROJECTS

This section will focus on the **selection** and **training** of interviewers for Listening Projects, be they concerned with oral history and testimony and/or oral tradition. The training outline draws heavily on the workshop manual *Giving Voice* developed by the **Panos Institute Oral Testimony Programme**. One of the beauties of oral testimony projects as outlined by Panos and their partners is that almost anyone with an informed interest in the subject matter in question can make a contribution with a relatively small amount of training - training which can be carried out by people who have not themselves got much experience in this work themselves, if necessary. A later section will consider more general aspects of interviewing and training interviewers in relation to other kinds of oral tradition and oral history projects. However, the points presented here are intended to cover the principles of such training and should be approached flexibly in line with your own needs and concerns.

Selecting interviewers for Listening Projects

Interviewers should be people you know (or be recommended by someone you know), whom you can trust to take the initiative in following up interesting points, and who will be sensitive in their handling of difficult subjects. Above all, **they must be good listeners**. If you feel able to leave the conduct of the interviews as much as possible to them by themselves, they will also feel more sense of purpose and ownership.

As a general rule, it is best if interviewers are of the same sex as the narrator. There are a number of topics which people feel more relaxed talking about man to man, woman to woman. At times, though, interesting material may emerge from taking the opposite approach. The important thing is to make such a decision with the narrator's concerns uppermost, and never force them into an uncomfortable situation.

Think about the number of interviewers that you can realistically train, manage and support. **In Panos' experience, up to 10 interviewers works well; it can be difficult to give adequate attention to everyone when there are more than 15 interviewers**. Even if there are more old than young people, or vice versa, ensure that when topics for discussion are being decided upon that all age groups (and sexes) within the community can make a contribution.

The interviewers themselves must be **interested** in the subject of the research and must have a good understanding of it. This is usually through personal experience, so that they can see the significance of what is being said, respond to it and find their own questions to ask in order to elicit further information. Probably most important is that the interviewers have **a good social understanding of the situation**; more technical information may not need to be that detailed. It is worth giving this aspect some thought, however. If the aim is to document, for example, traditional agricultural or health practices, then specialist knowledge of these areas will be necessary, if the interviewer isn't to appear foolishly ill-informed and probably fail in the task. Similarly, if the local political or historical background is complex and important to the interview, you risk losing much time and risk irritating the narrator if you need to keep asking them to explain or clarify references and events.

The interviewers should speak the language of the narrator so that translation will not be a problem. Ideally, they will be from, or live and/or work in the area/community.

Capacity building

In Oral Testimony projects the process of collection - and its empowering potential - is as important as the product. If you want to use professional researchers/interviewers, you may well get a higher *percentage* of 'successful' interviews, in which the majority of subjects are covered, and interesting topics skilfully pursued and teased out. But if you train members of your organisation and community to become interviewers, then you will have enriched the skills and experience of people who might otherwise never have done this work. And if things go as they should, they will also have gained in sensitivity and understanding of different perspectives and experiences, through the process of listening. In some instances they will be narrators as well, which may make them better interviewers.

Some of these untested interviewers may prove to be ill-suited to the task, and the project co-ordinator will experience the frustration of listening to/reading interviews where good leads are ignored, or in which the interviewer focuses on his/her own interests and doesn't allow the narrator to develop their own story and perspective. But when this 'capacity-building' process works, and the people involved really identify with the narrators, the project and its purpose, and if you are prepared for a certain variability in quality - then the results are worth the extra effort. There is a greater sense of ownership by those involved, and more likelihood that the material will be used by the communities concerned in ways which are valuable to them. Interviewers may also go on to start new projects, or to expand upon the original activities.

Insiders and outsiders

People who are closely associated with the narrators sometimes fail to ask certain questions. This may be because the answers seem obvious to them, or because they have made assumptions about behaviour or beliefs which may be commonly accepted - but not *necessarily* by the individual to whom they are listening. Some feel that an outsider can more easily ask for a detailed description of a local practice or event without it seeming artificial. A group of ethnic minority women in Southwest China, who interviewed rural women for a project that Panos ran with the Yunnan Minority Gender and Development Group and with Oxfam Hong Kong, discussed the pros and cons of 'insider' versus 'outsider' at length. They concluded that insiders (in this case, interviewers from the ethnic minority group and area) were, on balance, best. They had the advantage of a deep understanding of the local environment, which it was much harder for an outsider to develop unless they had a very long preparation time. Training, however, is also necessary to help insiders avoid certain pitfalls, such as assuming they know the answers or failing to ask the apparently obvious.

The most successful interviewers are those who can grasp the topic and the significance of the information gathered, and can transcribe interviews quickly. Anyone with experience of, or a clear aptitude for listening to/interviewing people should be considered - **good communication skills are vital**. Some project workers, for example, feel themselves distanced from, and in some ways superior to,

less educated members of their community. They would not make good interviewers. The more **sensitive** and **receptive** researchers are to other points of view and perceptions, the better. **Personal skills** can be as, if not more important than professional experience.

Enthusiasm is very important, since interviewing is quite arduous, may involve travel and may require patience to deal with frustrating delays and difficult conditions. Make sure the interviewers realise that they will have to transcribe the interviews they conduct. This is a time-consuming task, but is best done by the interviewers themselves, not least because they are most able to remember the context and resolve any bits on the tape which may seem unclear. Panos has occasionally trained interviewers who were good listeners, committed to the project's aims and keen to be involved, but whose level of literacy was low. This meant others had to take on their transcription. This is a possible - but not ideal - way of working.

Local knowledge

The more sensitised your interviewing team are to the local situation/conditions, the more they will understand the facts and significance of what narrators say, and be aware when something has been left *unsaid*. They are more likely to judge successfully whether gaps or silences are because something seemed too obvious to state; or because the question was inappropriate; or because the conversation has touched on areas the narrator prefers to forget, consciously or unconsciously. 'No comment' does not necessarily imply no opinion.

Familiarity with the local situation includes being aware of and respecting customary modes of speech and communication. Certain kinds of narrative, for example, may only be told at particular times, or seasons, or by certain individuals.

The right words

Part of sensitisation of the interviewers relates to matters of translation. Sometimes a situation has arisen where the mother tongue in which the interviews are being conducted may be suitable for ordinary family concerns and locally specific cultural and historical matters, but the interviewers use a national language (or sometimes English) to express other concepts. Thus thought and practice may be necessary to grasp the best ways to explain the purpose of the project and to describe certain words such as *gender relations*, *perception*, *value*, *priority* or even *development*. 'Testimony', for example, can itself have negative connotations, as in Cambodia where it revived the horrors of forced trials and confessions. Sometimes there is no exact equivalent of terms like these and interviewers may have to spend some time discussing these issues before they can find a way of expressing these ideas so that they feel comfortable with them.

Training interviewers for oral testimony projects

The **Panos Institute Oral Testimony Programme** has developed an outline of a five-day training workshop for interviewers on Oral Testimony Projects. It has been reproduced here because of the very good advice it offers on providing some crucial primary training for interviewers. Although the training refers to oral testimony projects, many of the points are also relevant to other kinds of oral research and recording, and the training could be adapted accordingly. **It is important that the advice is taken as a guideline for your work, not as a blueprint - you should adapt the ideas according to the particular needs of your project. No two projects are exactly the same and there are specific issues relating to work in your community or area that need to be considered on a case by case basis.** The word 'training' will be used here instead of 'workshop' as it may be that the sessions will be conducted in a less intensive manner - although the practice recordings and transcriptions should be carried out close together. Although a project co-ordinator should organise the training, and may lead it, the most important point is that the training itself is a **collaborative** and exploratory venture involving all those who are to take part in the interviewing and administration of the project.

Aims of training

Prior to carrying out recording or fieldwork, a period of training is required for everyone taking part. The primary purpose of this is:

- ◆ To discuss the aims and objectives of the project
- ◆ To discuss the subject being explored and develop a framework of questions
- ◆ To provide an opportunity to train interviewers and/or to provide practice opportunities for interviewing
- ◆ To finalise project plans

Who should participate?

1. The project co-ordinator and any other relevant members of the organisation(s) involved with the project
2. The interviewing team
3. A person who is familiar with interviewing and/or recording **or** someone who has read and familiarised themselves with the ideas in this manual
4. Any people with specialist knowledge of the locality/society/topic which is the main focus of the collection project
5. Representatives of the community of narrators

Outline of training sessions

1. Develop a shared understanding of the aims of the project

Ensure that all participants understand what the purpose of the project is and what it is hoping to achieve

2. Discuss the topics to be explored

Ensure that interviewers have sufficient background knowledge of the issue. Enable community representatives and people with specialist knowledge to contribute their local and personal knowledge and experience and to help identify which subjects are most likely to be of concern. Draw up a list of topics as they are raised. Discuss the groups of people to be interviewed. At the end of this second training session, all the interviewers should have a list of broad topic areas to ask questions about, which it is hoped will provide information relevant to the needs of the project. Below are examples of topic lists for a project collecting testimonies on the resettlement of mountain communities in **Lesotho** in Southern Africa. The project wanted to build a picture of the villagers' current life (which it was known would soon change due to relocation), and their experience of negotiating this relocation.

3. How to interview: questions

Ensure that interviewers understand the purpose of the topic list - that it provides guidelines for discussion, not a rigid list that has to be followed methodically. Interviewers need to be given the confidence to use their own judgement in deciding which issues to follow when, and what to ignore. It is extremely unlikely that they would want to cover all the topics with every narrator; most narrators will be more knowledgeable about or interested in just some of the issues/events. The important thing is to ensure that the overall collection covers the full range of issues and concerns identified.

Lesotho Oral Testimony Collection: Topics for Interviews

Family

Family history: parents; husband/wife

Number of children - where are they and what are they doing?

Number of brothers and sisters - where are they?

Contact outside village

Reasons for travelling to other villages and towns - now and in the past

If experienced town life - what was it like?

What do you think of people and life in the lowlands?

Family and social life

Health services - modern and traditional, use of herbal medicines

Diseases - have they changed, have perceptions of them changed?

Friendships: roles of men and women; relationship between generations; role of older people

Marriage - any changes; weddings; relations between husband and wives

Food and drink

Has diet changed? Impact of alcohol

Schooling and traditional education

History of access to schooling

What effects does schooling have on individuals? On the community?

What kind of education is needed for mountain communities?

Have there been important people in your life, who taught you things of value?

Cultural activities

Children's songs and stories

Songs; songs of history, praise songs, prayer songs, prayers and rituals to bring rain

Are there songs about resettlement?

Dancing music, women's dances for special occasions

Feasts, celebrations, funerals

Activities when not working

Initiation for boys and girls - differences with the past - what does it mean to become a man/woman now?

The mountains

Stories about where they live and about the mountains

Being a herdboyc - memories of; any herding songs or stories

What do they like about the mountains - what will they miss when they move?

Wildlife in the mountains - memories, stories and changes

Roads - impact of roads; how did they travel when there were no roads?

Personal histories and stories

Have they always lived in this place? What are your favourite or strongest memories?

The village

Special places: sacred places, powerful places, places important to individuals

Graves and graveyards

Social organisations and networks

Village history - relationship with other villages

How does the village receive information?

Social justice - crime

Is there much crime in the village - has this changed?

How are disputes solved - has this changed?

Chiefs and other authorities

Chiefs you have been ruled by - what does your chief mean to you?

What relationship do you have with other authorities; village development committees?

Livelihoods

How do you make your living? How did you make it in the past?

What do you have to buy because you can't make or grow it?

What do you gather and use from the mountains (e.g.: wild plants, herbs)?

Will it be the same in the new place?

Agriculture and livestock

Crops, yields - in the past and now

Markets for your produce in the past and now

Growing marijuana - is compensation a problem for this crop?

Importance of livestock as wealth, gifts, status, security

Livestock management, herding, breeding

Land

The importance of land to people - are attitudes to land changing?

Different types of land use - agriculture, grazing, communal grazing land

Management of grazing; grazing associations and grazing fees

Access to land - ownership

Feelings about loss of land

Resettlement

Impact of the water project so far - jobs, construction of roads

Where have you chosen to move and why? What are your expectations of life there?

How did you choose which kind of compensation to take?

How do you feel about different levels of compensation?

If you are taking cash compensation, how do you plan to use the money?

How are you preparing yourself for the change?

What relations do you have with the receiving community?

What was your experience of the compensation negotiations and process?

Was it different for women and men? Did you choose who to move with?

How do you feel about being under a new chief's jurisdiction?

What do you feel about the new house you will have

Taking the topic list as a starting point, choose a few topics and together develop a few questions to start people talking about the topic. One particular difficulty that interviewers from Burma may experience is the unfamiliarity with this kind of interviewing, treating the topic list as a rigid set of questions. Ensure that interviewers know that one of their most important roles is simply to provide the leads by which people will feel confident to talk as freely and openly as possible. Encourage the interviewers to see themselves as ears for what the person would like to say, not as people on a mission to ask questions on a list which can then be ticked off as 'finished'. Many people also find it difficult to think of **follow-up questions**, especially if they are talking to someone whom they have only just met. In this situation, it may be appropriate to discuss during the training ways in which social links may be established between interviewer and narrator before the recording takes place. Discuss how people in the community introduce themselves to each other and share personal information in establishing early relations, how they ask each other questions and how conversations are built up. Many minority ethnic communities from Burma, for example, have complicated systems of kinship, and most establish their family background etc. as an essential component of any introduction. Discuss how this can be a natural way of breaking the ice - but sensitivity also needs to be shown to that fact that status relationships are frequently established in this way. Questions should be phrased openly and be introduced appropriately, according to cultural norms. Answers which evoke a 'yes' or 'no' answer are not particularly useful. More open questions which elicit **explanation, reflection, observation, analysis** and **anecdote** are to be preferred.

What are the cultural norms of asking questions in the community and how might these restrict or assist the process of breaking down barriers between interviewer and narrator? Interviewers must be familiar with and operate within whatever the appropriate cultural forms of conversation and communication may be. What is merely probing for information for some, can be deemed intrusive or threatening by others. For example, certain questions that in some cultures may seem neutral and rather mundane, such as 'How many children do you have?', may prove offensive. Interviewers in a project in the Sahel region of Africa, who eventually recorded conversations with nearly 500 mainly elderly men and women, knew that for many of them to divulge this information to a stranger could be perceived as tempting fate - an open invitation to God to take a child away. They found other ways to get their family history.

When we listen to people speaking, we ourselves are actively involved in the process - we respond to what people say with frequent interjections, affirmations, facial expressions etc. When we fail to respond in ways that are culturally expected by the speaker, they may feel inhibited, leading to increased tension on both sides. The listener, therefore, must be taught that listening is also a part of 'speaking' and that they cannot sit passively ticking off a list of questions if they wish the narrator to be forthcoming. Remind the interviewers that the emphasis is not on documenting facts and activities but on uncovering their meaning to people.

Emphasise the fact that questions which draw on the narrator's personal experience will be much more successful than more general ones. Similarly, if you want to introduce broad topics, focus on more specific aspects of those topics. You will get much more accurate, detailed and interesting information if you ask people about their **individual actions** and **feelings, responses** and **experiences**. Otherwise you run the risk of getting superficial answers or received wisdom on many issues, which may not reflect reality. 'How has the silver/jade mining industry affected this region?' is likely to elicit a general answer, and probably most people will

say much the same - or will feel concerned that they are not giving the 'correct' answer. Questions which focus on the narrator's own experience of the impact of the industry and those of others in his/her family will be more detailed (and may then give rise to wider reflection).

4. How to interview: practicalities

Discuss some of the practical aspects of conducting interviews - **equipment, travel, making arrangements** etc., and the problems and issues that may arise.

Make sure that the interviewers are familiar with the recording equipment. One of the best ways to familiarise the interviewers with some of the practical issues concerning interviewing is to get them involved in **role play** situations. These can be great fun and can be a good way of building morale and a sense of cooperation within the group of interviewers - and when they themselves are being interviewed, it can give a valuable insight into what it is like to be on the other end of the microphone.

Role play

Role play is a very popular training technique and is wonderfully simple to do. Ensure that a relaxed and jovial atmosphere prevails - it is an artificial situation, after all. Make sure that adequate time is given for discussion of the lessons learned from the role play to take place - do not start a role play if you only have a few minutes remaining.

The technique is very simple - but it is easy for the impact of the role play to go awry if the instructions are confused. For example, if it is best that one partner does not know what is on the other person's role play card, try to ensure that that is adhered to. Some people can feel very embarrassed doing role play - at least initially. If they prefer, they could sit with someone else and observe first time round until they feel confident that they are not going to be asked to do something about which they might feel humiliated. It is sometimes a good idea to ask two of the more confident members of the group to demonstrate a role play for everyone else first.

Basic technique:

- ◆ Divide the group into pairs - if there are odd numbers, don't worry, they can take turns - one of the pair is **A** and the other is **B**. If you have 10 interviewers, have five cards for role A and five for role B so that each pair is doing the same activity
- ◆ Give A role card A, give B role card B
- ◆ Allow them to practise the situation on the card for two or three minutes, then give a new card changing the roles or swap the cards over
- ◆ When the group has finished, discuss together what lessons were learned and their impressions of the roles. If an objective was set e.g.: to find a solution to a problem - discuss what the solution was, or what it could be

Example Role Play 1 - The Importance Of Listening

Give one Role A card to one interviewer and a Role B card to another. Tell them that they must not look at or show each other their cards.

Role A - You have a serious problem in your life - your wife/husband has left you (or) you have lost your job (or) you have lost all your money on a bad business deal. Tell your partner about it and ask for their help

Role B - DO NOT SHOW YOUR CARD TO YOUR PARTNER. Your partner is going to tell you something very important. Do not show interest in what they are saying - yawn, close your eyes, pretend to fall asleep, do not look at them or give them any eye contact.

After a few minutes, discuss as a group how the interviewers felt - especially how Role A players felt at the response that was given to them.

Change roles and give out the following cards to ensure that both interviewers have been in the role of disinterested listener.

Role A - You have a serious problem with your son/daughter. They are doing badly at school and you are worried that their friends are a bad influence - even that they may be getting involved with drugs. You desperately need your friends advice.

Role B - DO NOT SHOW YOUR PARTNER YOUR CARD. They are going to ask for your advice but you don't want to listen to them. Start writing a letter or reading a book, don't offer them any useful advice.

Repeat as before and open out the discussion to include how we show people we are listening to them and that we are interested in what they are saying. Focus on the act of listening and how it affects the act of speaking.

Example Role Play 2A: Interviewing and Narrating

The following situations all provide opportunities for interviewers to think about different interview situations, and how they might cope with them. The general idea is that one is the interviewer and that the other is the person being interviewed. Choose a simple introductory topic to get the interview roles going. Assure people that they can make up anything that they want to say, it does not have to be true - it's simply a role to practise their techniques. Make sure that the partners do not show each other their cards. Change roles frequently.

Role A - You are being interviewed. Be as co-operative and polite as possible and try to answer all the questions as fully as possible, as long as you feel comfortable with them.

Role B - You are an interviewer. Do not allow the narrator to finish what they are trying to say. Keep interrupting them or changing the subject.

Additional role cards for B: change the roles frequently to give everyone a chance to play both the interviewer and the narrator:

- ◆ *An insensitive or aggressive interviewer*
- ◆ *An interviewer who keeps asking very long and complicated questions*
- ◆ *An interviewer who cannot think of any follow-up questions and ticks off answers against a list of questions*

Example Role Play 2B:

A variation on the above role play is to create difficulties with the narrator. For example:

Role A - You are the interviewer. You are trying to interview someone about their life

Role B - You are a narrator. Unfortunately, you are very nervous and will only reply 'Yes', 'No' or 'I don't know' to any question

Alternatives for Role B:

- ◆ *The narrator won't keep to the point*
- ◆ *The narrator tries to use the interview as an opportunity to criticise their neighbour*

Other scenarios for discussion

The following situations may be adapted to suit the particular situation of your community or area. Some of the situations could be discussed in pairs or in small groups and then conclusions could be compared. Some situations could be discussed in an open group discussion. There are no 'correct' answers but be aware of the degree of sensitivity that your prospective interviewers show in their discussion. This may indicate whether they are likely have the appropriate personal skills to make them good interviewers.

1. You have been interviewing a woman about growing up in a refugee camp and she has seemed comfortable with this. You decide to ask for more detailed information about her family, at which point she begins to cry. How do you handle this?
2. You are researching changes in marriage. A woman talks very freely until her husband walks in on the interview and sits down next to her. She freezes, and he starts answering your questions. What do you do?
3. You are a fieldworker with a local organisation, interviewing a landowner. The aim is to build up a community history, and explore social and economic change over the last 50 years. It is soon clear that he is going out of his way to praise the work of your organisation, and you begin to suspect he is trying to persuade your organisation to give him financial support as part of their development work. What do you do?
4. You are interviewing a local farmer, whom you have known for a long time, about the changing environment and its impact on agriculture. She takes the opportunity to repeat, at length, allegations against a neighbour whom she accuses of stealing a large proportion of her land. Familiar with the case, you know this not to be true. Do you let her continue until she 'runs out of steam', contradict her, or try to change the subject as quickly as possible?
5. You are interviewing someone about their experience of conflict. She recounts several of her experiences in great detail, seemingly comfortable in sharing her stories. Taking her lead, you ask her some more personal details about fighting at which point she clams up and will not speak. Do you push her, try to find another way to ask the question, or leave it?

5. Practice interviews

BEFORE the training begins, the co-ordinator should ensure that all the potential interviewers have arranged to interview someone, a family member or a friend for example, just for practice. The interview should last about one hour and to be conducted AFTER the training sessions outlined above. Ideally, another interviewer should watch them while they practice, and this observational role can then be changed over when the original observer conducts their practice interview - NOT with the same person.

6. Practice transcription

Interviewers should immediately begin transcribing the interview they have just made

7. Review

The group should consider some of the practice testimonies that have been recorded and transcribed to discuss any problems or difficulties, and also to compare differences in the way each individual has set about their task. They should consider the effectiveness of different types of questioning. They should also discuss issues relating to translation if this has been necessary. The co-ordinator should assess the various skills and attributes of the interviewers and should be particularly aware of people who appear over-confident, as these people frequently do not make good interviewers, or those who seem to linger too long on the intimate personal details of people's lives.

8. Refining the project

Finally, the project should be refined as follows:

- ◆ The topic list may be revised and amended in the light of the review session, and some changes necessary in approach or content may be identified
- ◆ The final discussion should focus on the location and range of narrators, ensuring as representative a spread as possible of the communities concerned, and of people who can talk about the concerns, events and issues identified. You may need to ensure a range of ages, occupations and social groups as well. You should also think about the gender balance you may need and about the schedule for the fieldwork; this can greatly help with both the organisation and quality of the testimony collection.
- ◆ Finally, run through the ideas again for the follow-up activities planned. Arrange to discuss some of these with the narrators, and other members of the community. Ask the interviewers to make sure they take account of their comments or any other ideas which they may have, and feed them back to the project coordinator(s) etc. Remember those individuals/organizations you identified as being able to provide social/cultural/environmental/economic /political/historical background - might they review some of the final interviews for balance and accuracy? You could also discuss potential follow-up activities involving these organizations if appropriate.

Planning training sessions

Panos suggest holding a five day workshop for training as this can be an effective way of intensifying the training experience, and may be more practical if people have to travel in from outlying camps and villages. However, the training sessions may be split-up and conducted on different occasions if that is more appropriate. It is important that the practice interviews are immediately followed by transcription practise and that the review and refining sessions follow shortly afterwards when ideas are still fresh. The following are therefore just guidelines as to how any training could be broken down into manageable units which may be adapted according to your situation.

TRAINING/WORKSHOP SESSION		CONTENT
Session 1: AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Introductions, project outline and methodology 	Session 1: PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Creating an ideas list of topics 	Broadly what the intentions of the project are, what people will have to do, the rationale for the method and its value as a supplement to other research Discussing peoples concerns, experiences etc.
Session 2: AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Refining the topics to be explored in the interviews ◆ Preparing for interviews 	Session 2: PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Preparing for interviews - kinds of questions, ethics etc ◆ Role playing and practical training 	Try to group the topics into themes and key issues and consider sample questions for eliciting information Discuss the ethical and other scenarios Familiarise people with equipment Role play and advice on transcription
Session 3: AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Practice interviews 	Session 3: PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Begin transcription 	Do practice interviews and begin transcription - ideally with some supervision if the narrators can be asked to come to the training site
Session 4: AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Complete transcription 	Session 4: PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Review the experience 	Complete transcription of the practice interviews and review the lessons learned from the experience
Session 5: AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Review the practice testimonies 	Session 5: PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Refine the project 	Review the testimonies Refine topic and question lists Discuss selection of narrators, schedule etc Feedback about training/workshop

Planning the fieldwork

You may have had an idea from the beginning of the number of interviews you plan to collect. Most of Panos' partners worked for **a set period of time** and gathered **between 35 and 50**, with **each interviewer gathering on average about seven each**, sometimes more. Since some of the interviews will inevitably be less successful or interesting than others, you may want to collect slightly more than the agreed amount. Obviously, if a project is to run over a long time, you could collect any number of interviews, or you could plan to keep adding to the collection at different stages.

One thing to consider is that most people get better at interviewing with practice, because their confidence grows and therefore their ability to relax and empathise. So it is better to give a few people a reasonable number to do, rather than a lot of people a few each.

Interviewing is tiring work and needs alertness and enthusiasm. Interviews are likely to last between 45 minutes and 2 hours, but introductions, rapport building, finding a suitable location etc. will add to the time needed. If a narrator still has a lot to say after two hours, a second interview should be arranged. More than two hours at a time is usually too long and tiring for both interviewer and narrator.

Three days' consecutive interviewing is probably as much as one interviewer can do at a time without losing concentration or enthusiasm. Some of Panos' interview teams were fieldworkers who carried on their normal activities and gathered their interviews over quite a few months, every now and then fitting in an interview. This can work well, as long as the momentum doesn't die, but it can mean a dilution of concentration and thought, so that the interviewer fails to pick up on common or conflicting threads or interesting connections between individual accounts. Probably the best results are obtained when the interviewer can devote a block of time to the interviews, rather than having to fit them in around other work.

Selecting narrators for oral testimony projects

Unless you are deliberately focusing on a particular sector, narrators should come from a range of ages, occupations, social backgrounds, and experiences. Most of them should be 'ordinary' people who can speak about their own experiences, perceptions and concerns. But it can be useful to include people who are organisers or who represent organizations, such as women's groups or community organizations. These informants will be able to talk more broadly about a community's situation and needs, the changes which may take place and how people are trying to address these. This kind of interview is particularly important if part of the audience for your project comprises NGOs and development workers, who will be interested in interventions that are being made, and people's views of these.

Where changing social, environmental and economic customs or conditions are the focus of a study, it will be important to include those who perform some of a community's traditional functions, for example, local healer/herbalist, religious leader etc. Selecting individuals you know through your work or local contacts has two potential advantages: they may already have a degree of confidence in your organisation/area of activity and therefore in your interviewer so rapport will be easier

to build up; you will have more chance of being able to select people who can talk fluently, have interesting things to say, and may positively enjoy being interviewed. It is important, however, not to neglect those people who appear to be less 'easy' to interview, but whose experiences and perspectives you suspect to be particularly illuminating.

Any oral testimony project should make a special effort to embrace a wide range of opinion and experience, and deliberately seek to include those who within 'the community' may be overlooked, spoken for or even excluded. **Otherwise you run the risk of reinforcing hierarchies, collective myths and dominant viewpoints** within your narrator group/project audience.

Group interviews

Most interviews will be with individuals, but the occasional group interview can be valuable: being in a group sometimes gives a speaker confidence or generates a more lively and original discussion. It is also useful to hear a consensus view of particular experiences or issues. Groups may set their own agenda for discussion, raising topics of most interest to them as a group - and this can be a valuable insight in itself. Such sessions can also highlight discrepancies between individual and collective views of the same event/experience. However, group dynamics may mean that less assured participants are not able to get across their version of events.

In some societies the group is the familiar forum for discussion. People may be willing to be interviewed individually, but only after there has been some collective debate and agreement over this approach.

ISSUES IN INTERVIEWING ON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

Many of the points just made about oral testimony projects are relevant to oral history projects, too, and the points can easily be adapted for these purposes. However, there are a number of additional and/or specific points relating to oral history interviewing that can usefully be made. Most notably, your project interviews will probably be recorded by a more limited number of interviewers who will have some valued experience or specialist historical knowledge, and who are deemed capable of guiding the speaker in quite specific ways, whereas oral testimony interviewers, although they are informed and interested, may not have such specialist knowledge. The following notes have been adapted from the internet site of the **Southern Oral History Programme** of the University of North Carolina:⁴³

1. Begin by **defining the historical problem** you wish to investigate. Only then can you decide whom to interview and what to ask
2. In order to avoid the danger of **interview bias**, you must be aware of your own cultural assumptions, values and attitudes. Be self-aware and self-disciplined in your response to what the speaker says
3. Before the first interview, do as much **background research** as possible. Oral history cannot be separated from other tools of historical research
4. Select speakers who will be able and willing to provide the information you need. They may be chosen because they have **special knowledge** or occupy a unique position in relation to a historical event, a movement or institution
5. Draw up a list of **topics** and **questions** as a support during the interview. Some people **may want to know what questions you want to ask them beforehand** in which case you should oblige and respect their requests relating to certain issues. Ensure that you agree together on the use of tape recorders and future use of tapes
6. Interviews may be **autobiographical** or they may be **topical**. In either case, begin at a point in time previous to the central event you want to explore
7. You should seek a balance in which you allow speakers to express the logic of their lives as they understand it, while at the same time maintaining a sense of

⁴³ <http://www.unc.edu/depts/sohp/notes.html>

the **overall direction** of the conversation and framing questions so as to elicit information that pertains to your area of interest.

8. Seek **concrete examples** of attitudes and feelings from which you can infer more subjective orientations. Focus on behaviour, but try to understand the meaning the speaker attaches to his/her actions. Develop **facts** and **events** first, then explore **feelings** and **values**. You may need to stimulate the speaker's memory or reduce chronological confusion by **supplying facts** learned from **background research**
9. It may be helpful to arrange the **sequence** of topics so as to postpone until last questions that may be threatening or challenging to the respondent - but try to finish positively
10. When a respondent seems **unwilling** or unable to provide certain information, try approaching the topic from another angle, indicating contradictory information that you have obtained from other sources, or wait until later in the interview to return to the topic
11. Ordinarily an interview session should last no more than 90 minutes. Be alert to signs of **fatigue, distraction or boredom**. Conduct a long interview in several sessions. It is often helpful to re-interview the respondent after you have analysed the content of the interview and as your understanding of the research problem evolves
12. Remember that the interview is part of the process of 'history making'. The goal is the **synthesis** of this material with **other historical sources** and **interpretations**. Try to engage your speaker in this process by asking for their **interpretive comments** and other ways in which they can participate in this process

Case Study: Interviewing the business and political élite of Singapore - *Lim How Seng*⁴⁴

Much interest in using oral history as a source of historical writing among groups from Burma's minority ethnic communities focuses on the need to write a history of recent political events. This influences the types of people who are likely to be selected for interviewing. Such projects are likely to concentrate on interviewing élite members of the community - be they influential traders and business people, military or political leaders. Such interviews represent different challenges compared to those of interviewing 'ordinary' members of the community. The following notes are taken from Lim How Seng's experiences of engaging in this kind of élite interviewing in a Southeast Asian context:

1. Élite individuals are typically used to public speaking and making public presentations of themselves
2. Interviews have to be **thoroughly** researched beforehand. Most of these people expect to be interviewed by senior persons with a strong subject knowledge
3. Many distrust the idea of giving an oral history interview because of their unfamiliarity with the form and their suspicions about the use of recorded interviews in the future
4. Many of these people are still active in their field of interest and they find it difficult to make time for such interviews - delays, postponements and cancellations are common
5. It is important to be persistent in your requests for interviews, but not to pester
6. It is a good idea to have a preliminary meeting where issues of concern and the line of the interview can be discussed/clarified
7. Frequent distractions and interruptions may occur during the interviews - but on the whole it is best to interview these people in their own surroundings in which they feel relaxed
8. Certain topics which are deemed sensitive will only receive stereotypical answers - personal accounts are sometimes refreshingly honest but accounts of social and public life tend to be dry
9. Most do not like to be controlled by the interviewer or to be interrupted by questions so it is important to keep a checklist of topics that need to be covered - adopt a liberal approach but tactfully bring back to the issue of interest when appropriate

⁴⁴ Notes taken from Lim How Seng's article in 'Oral History in Southeast Asia', Singapore, 1998, pp.55-65. Lim How Seng is Director of the Singapore History Museum and in 1979-93 was Project Co-ordinator, Assistant Director and Deputy Director of the Oral History Centre.

ISSUES IN INTERVIEWING ON ORAL TRADITION PROJECTS

Unlike oral testimony and oral history projects, the role of the 'interviewer' when recording oral traditions may be reduced simply to that of 'listener'/audience during a performance - yet even then there are important issues to consider concerning the relation of the performer to the audience and to the recording situation. In projects involving the recording of oral traditions, it is important that allowances are made for **follow-up** work related to the recording between the 'listener' and 'speaker' **after the main recording has taken place**. This may be necessary to obtain **commentary** or **explanation** of some of the points that were recorded, for **translation** etc. In these later interviews, much of what has already been said will be of relevance, but there are some further useful points to bear in mind. The following comments by Jan Vansina are useful for reminding us of the influences that a recording situation can have on any performance.⁴⁵ The comments are particularly relevant for Burma's minority ethnic communities where oral traditions as a cultural expression have become inherently politicised:

When a tradition is to be recorded on tape or paper, an unusual situation is created, as a performance becomes a testimony. ... The performer becomes informant. The informants must take into account what the reactions of their fellow countrymen will be, and they know that the latter will be critical of how they behave. Informants wonder as to what uses the testimony will be put. ... Being in the wider arena new items crop up that are related to that arena. Payment in currency, ingratiating oneself with authorities well beyond the 'customary' authorities, a belief in the superior knowledge of the interviewer - all are linked to a much wider arena. ... The behaviour of the informant depends largely on the impression he or she has formed of the researcher.

One particular problem relates to the relative educational status of the 'speaker' and 'listener'. It is commonly the case among Burma's communities today that those who are skilled and experienced in the community's oral culture and traditions lack status - an issue which is linked to the perceptions of literacy, education and development that were discussed at the beginning of the manual. This can lead to two principal difficulties:

- ◆ The community tends to focus on a limited number of **encyclopedic informants** who are credited with speaking for the community as a whole on

⁴⁵ *Oral Tradition as History*, Vansina J., EAE, Nairobi, 1985, pp.110-111

these matters. These people have become 'encyclopedic' in their knowledge of oral traditions often because they have pursued such research out of their own curiosity, as a hobby. However, such informants seldom have appropriate levels of depth of knowledge on all matters - but by adopting their role as 'community spokesperson' they can occasionally impede attempts to record others with less breadth of information, but more depth, by deriding them as 'ill informed' or, typically, 'badly educated'. This needs to be avoided.

- ◆ Educational status is so important in defining many relationships in Burma that informants who **lack confidence** in their own knowledge and expertise, possibly because they lack conventional (literate) educational credentials, may not be forthcoming in their own interpretations of the material. They will be too concerned that their answer will be considered 'incorrect' by the researcher. They may also be reluctant to point out errors in understanding that the researcher may make. For this reason, it is sensible to avoid open criticism or comparison with other forms of the tradition recited elsewhere until such time that a trust-based relationship has been built up between informant and researcher.

TYPES OF INTERVIEW

The following comments are relevant to research on oral histories, testimonies and traditions.⁴⁶ Even if a recording of a performance of an oral tradition is being made, it will still be necessary to elicit afterwards the performer's interpretation etc. of the tradition, which must be obtained by careful and sensitive questioning. Therefore, any oral research will incorporate elements of question asking and answering and it is this which the manual will now consider. The term 'interview' will be used as a shorthand for a whole range of question-and-response based situations.

When seeking to obtain information for oral histories and oral testimonies there are many different approaches that can be taken to gathering material, depending on the project's objectives, e.g.:

- ◆ **Individual life stories** - ranging across all sectors of someone's life
- ◆ **An issue-focused interview** - focusing primarily on particular aspects of someone's experiences, such as his/her working life, or the impact of a particular event, such as military conflict and resettlement
- ◆ **Group discussions** - ranging from husband and wife to larger groups defined by age, occupation etc.

The most important thing to remember, though, is that each narrator is an individual, and the most valuable information you will get will be that which reflects their first-hand experience. Therefore, no two interviews should be alike, with exactly the same questions. In oral testimony projects there will be some basic questions in common - those needed to elicit basic information and biographical data, and to identify particular themes and issues (and to compare different responses to the same points) - but then the interview should develop in ways which draw upon the narrator's personal experiences.

⁴⁶ The information in this section is an amalgamation from Panos publications 'Giving Voice' and 'Listening for a Change.'

Life story interviews

These are normally private, one-to-one encounters between interviewer and narrator. In some societies, a one-to-one interview may not be acceptable, particularly for women, and in many situations it may be a practical impossibility. The interviewer needs to be aware of the impact of the interview situation on what is said and should incorporate this in his/her notes.

An average life story interview may need two or three sessions and can take anything from one to eight hours in total. Breaking up the interview into separate sessions gives people time to remember and explore the past and makes recollection more of a process than an occasion. It takes the pressure off a single session, when the narrator might feel obliged to cram everything in. Things triggered in one session can be reflected upon by the narrator in peace and then brought to the next. The interviewer can similarly benefit from a pause between sessions.

Remember that a life story interview can often have a profound effect on the narrator, who may never have told someone their memories before, and certainly is unlikely to have recalled their whole life in the course of a few hours. For most people, recounting their life story is a positive, if emotional, experience from which they can gain much satisfaction and a renewed sense of perspective, but the listener should always ensure that the narrator is comfortable at the end of the interview and is surrounded by any support they need, whether from family or friends.

One of the great advantages of a life story interview is that it tracks a person's experience across all the different economic and social sectors of their life. To do this effectively, an interview needs to cover a certain cross-section of topics.

Some basic **biographical data** should be covered at the start, such as: the narrator's name; when and where they were born; their occupation(s); where their parents live(d); what their parents do/did; what family they have.

These and similar questions often provide a useful 'warm-up' during which both parties can get the feel of each other and begin to develop a rapport. The other topics in a life story can be divided into three broad sections - **family** and **early life**, **working life**, **adult family** and **social life**.

Topics for a life story

Issues of family and early life

- ◆ Family background: grandparents, elderly relations, extended family and their influence
- ◆ Parents: where they came from, occupations, roles, personalities, relationship with narrator
- ◆ Brothers, sisters, childhood friends: children's responsibilities, games, leisure
- ◆ Everyday life: the household, food, domestic roles etc.
- ◆ Special occasions: weddings, funerals, festivals etc.
- ◆ Local geography: village, town, land rights, communal areas, markets, meeting places, neighbours, important people and interesting characters
- ◆ Social and cultural life: religion and politics, education, important friendships, influences, ambitions

Working life

- ◆ Occupation(s) inside and outside the home: domestic, agricultural, vocational, professional, formal, informal, paid and unpaid
- ◆ How the skills were learnt: the work environment, what the work involves and with whom, formal and informal training or apprenticeship
- ◆ Any changes of occupation and why: success and failures in working life
- ◆ Other income-generating opportunities, e.g.: crafts, brewing, trading
- ◆ A typical working day: seasonal variations
- ◆ Important influences at work: mentors, colleagues, friends, enemies
- ◆ Work-related organisations: co-operatives, informal groups, social life connected with work
- ◆ Wide changes affecting work: environmental, industrial, political etc.

Adult family and social life

- ◆ Central relationships: single, married, separated, divorced or widowed; monogamous or polygamous; the meeting of partner(s), their background and occupation; any wedding; any setting up or joining a household; who controls money and assets, the division of work and decision-making; expectations and ideals of marriage, the family home, children, childbirth, family planning, child care, ideals of parenting, affection and discipline; hopes and ambitions for children; the deaths of partners and family members. If single or childless: by choice or circumstance; attitude of others to this
- ◆ Leisure activities: hobbies, friends and relationships, music, drama, dance, storytelling; religious or cultural festivals and entertainments; local groups or clubs; the community, the neighbours
- ◆ Old age: becoming grandparents and/or other rights, responsibilities, privileges or difficulties which come with age.

Family tree interviews

In the course of a life story interview, the narrator will describe many members of his or her family from contemporary or previous generations. These people will obviously be mentioned largely in terms of their impact upon the narrator. However, it is possible to focus on these other family members in more depth by asking the narrator to supply second-hand accounts of their relatives' lives. This technique can be called 'Family Tree Interviewing'.

One project run by the UN's International Labour Office (ILO) in Kerala in India provides a good example of this. The project was introduced to discover the effects of a development project that had been introduced some thirty years previously. The development project had not targeted women's lives directly but it was known that the impact on women's lives had been significant. A sample of 30 women in the area was selected and case studies taken of their families, using life stories of the women themselves but including information gleaned from them on the lives of their family members from current and preceding generations spanning the 30 year period. The result gave a very full picture of the changes in women's lives throughout the 30 years, revealing changes that had not been anticipated.

This kind of interviewing is more time-consuming but it can provide much more information about aspects of change. It is perhaps most useful when looking for **trends**, rather than the specific detail of direct personal experience.

Single-issue interviews

Single-issue interviews may be carried out on a one-to-one or group basis, and focus on a specific aspect of the narrator's life. As such they can be shorter than a life story, but more detailed. Single-issue interviews can offer valuable insights and can be the main way of learning about a particular event or for an investigation into a particular area of knowledge or experience. For example, they might involve interviewing farmers about land use and water conservation methods, or a traditional healer about botany and plant use. They require the interviewer to have more detailed background or technical knowledge of the subject matter than is necessary for a more wide-ranging life story.

Diary interviewing

Diary interviewing is a method which is increasingly being used by social scientists. It involves selecting a sample of people who contribute regular diary entries as part of a continuing and long-term study of social trends. Such a study might ask people to report on specific issues, or it might seek more general life story material. The participants make a commitment to keep a written or oral, tape-recorded diary. Entries might be made on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis, are then sent in and analysed centrally, over time.

Alternatively, diary interviewing can involve a less rigorous procedure whereby the participant is interviewed at key moments over a period of time. In a study of indigenous agricultural practices, for example, these might include particular times during the cropping calendar such as land preparation, sowing, weeding, harvesting and threshing. In a more general life story study, such moments might include

religious festivals, rites of passage or different stages of educational or working life. The objective of interviewing is therefore to collect a running progress of a person's experience over time and not just retrospectively.

Group interviews

Group interviews can also be collected. Indeed, in many societies, group interviews may be more in keeping with the customary ways of communicating. If the concept of a one-to-one interview seems unusual or unnatural, the format of group discussions or public meetings may be more familiar and interview collection can be adapted accordingly.

Groups can bring out the best and worst in people. Sometimes by taking the focus off individuals, they make them less inhibited, but the opposite can occur just as easily. A group may subtly pressurise people towards a socially acceptable testimony or a mythical representation of the past or of a current issue which everyone feels is 'safe' to share and which may in some sense be idealised. Communal histories gathered in this way can involve a powerful process of myth construction or fabrication which **misrepresents the real complexity of the community**. At worst this can develop into a persistent false consciousness which can only tolerate the good things, or remembers an exaggeratedly united and/or suffering community. The voices of the less confident, the poorer and the powerless, are less likely to be heard, and so the variety of experience and the clashes and conflicts within a community may well remain hidden.

But groups can also be especially productive, as members 'spark' off one another. Memories are triggered, facts can be verified or checked, views can be challenged and the burning issues of the past can be discussed and argued about again in the light of the present. Group work can also increase rapport between project workers/interviewers and the community, encouraging people to come forward for one-to-one sessions if appropriate.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Before any interview or recording, you should have spent considerable time thinking about the questions that you will use, and how they will assist in collecting the material that you want.

Questions to elicit meaning

In this kind of work, the researcher/interviewer needs to be as interested in peoples' **understanding** of and **feelings** about events and changes, at least as much as in the events/changes themselves. How do people make sense of the past, and of what is happening now? Do they think about it in more than one way? What is their interpretation of events? The key concepts to elicit are:

VALUES

PERCEPTIONS

EXPERIENCES

PRIORITIES

These concepts will be expressed in different ways in the local languages concerned but it is a good idea to work out how they are expressed so that you can, if necessary, explain your rationale and methodology to the narrator if they are confused by your line of questioning at times. Certain kinds of questions will help you obtain this kind of information. Many of them can be used as follow-up questions and for exploring the **meaning** and **significance** of events described or information given by the narrator. In English we usually use 'Wh-' questions: why, where, when, what, ...to help make these kinds of questions, which give a longer answer than 'Yes/No' questions, e.g.:

- ◆ Why do you think this happened? How do/did you feel about it?
- ◆ What do you think was the meaning of this? How does it affect you?
- ◆ Why did you make your decision? In what ways was it difficult?

Types of question

The following is a list of question types in English. Don't worry about the grammatical structure in relation to your own language - think instead about the function of the question and its appropriacy in helping you to obtain the kind of information that you desire, and then how it relates (or translates) in the language in which you will be interviewing. For example, the language in which the interview is carried out may have a large number of question markers which convey different nuances in the way the question is being put. Consider how these question markers may change the tone of your question or influence the kind of information that is sought in similar ways to those outlined below in the English language.

Open Questions

Most of your questions should be of this nature. They encourage the narrator to expand upon the topic and to give their own views and interpretation. They do not assume answers or direct the speaker to give a certain answer.

e.g.: How did you feel about that?

How did the soldier's treat you?

Closed Questions

Compare: Did you leave then? (closed)

How did you feel about that decision? (open - encourages a longer, more reflective answer)

In the first question, only a 'Yes' or 'No' answer is expected. Sometimes a narrator will continue to give more information, but in cases where the narrator is not so forthcoming, such a question can have the effect of closing down the conversation on a topic. If you ask a closed question, you should always have a follow-up question ready to elicit the information you want e.g.:

Had you met him before? (Yes/No) What was your first impression of him?

Leading Questions

These tend to assume an answer and usually the narrator will respond as the question suggests rather than thinking through their genuine thoughts and experiences on the matter, e.g.:

Did the soldiers treat you roughly? (leading question)

How did the soldiers treat you? (open question)

Double-barrelled questions

These are when we make a question too complicated by asking two questions at the same time. Usually it will result in only one of the questions being answered properly. Sometimes this kind of question can confuse people and lead them to lose confidence by feeling that they cannot follow what is being asked of them, e.g.:

When did you marry and what does your husband do? (two questions in one)

Other question types and techniques

Precision questions may be asked when we need to clarify a point of detail such as a specific name or place. **Oblique questions** may be used when it is hard for someone to answer something by relating it directly to themselves. For example, when a direct answer may implicate them in some activity or associate them with a point of view that may place them in difficulties in some way; or it may be that the subject is too personal for them to feel comfortable discussing it directly. It may be possible to discuss such subjects in the third person. For example, you could say, /

heard that some farmers sell opium - what do you think about this? rather than ask, *Do you sell opium?* This is also related to another way of broaching difficult subjects in a non-direct way - a **statement question**. You make as neutral sounding a statement as possible about the issue you want to raise and then ask for the narrators opinion or experience on the matter. This kind of question is also useful when you want to change the subject tactfully. Another way of dealing with potentially sensitive issues is known as **sanctioning**. You acknowledge your understanding of a custom, belief or practice, for example, that may be discomfoting and then ask for the narrator's opinion or experience related to it.

INTERVIEW PROMPTS

Sometimes other techniques than verbal questioning will be necessary to elicit information or to trigger memories. You may, therefore, like to use a range of different prompts and memory aids as part of the collection process.

Objects and artefacts

You may use prompts from the place in which the interview is taking place by asking questions about them of a narrator who seems ill at ease or who has difficulty with recall. For example, if they have **photographs** or **pictures on display**, you may ask some questions about them. Physical objects such as old **tools**, **traditional costumes** or artefacts can provide the focus for more detailed information. A farmer will often be more eloquent when holding an implement and describing its function. A refugee may find much more to say when looking at a picture of home. However, any prop should be carefully chosen, otherwise they will tend to distract the narrator and divert the interview instead of giving it depth.

There may also be certain **objects** or **procedures** by which a community has traditionally conducted group discussions which help to focus attention on a speaker at a particular time. It may be a good idea to incorporate these customs into group interviews, for example. It is not always necessary to conduct an interview in a sedentary way, either. Sometimes more information will be obtained if the interview is conducted at the **place** or in the area under question.

Visual techniques

Some visual techniques can help people to express their ideas about the past, about change and about their community with greater ease than a conventional verbal interview alone. This is particularly the case in communities which are unused to the kind of interview style detailed here. One of the easiest to use is to **draw a map** on a piece of paper or on the ground with a stick. These are particularly useful for illustrating ecological histories and previous land use patterns.

One variant on this relates to the use of **place names** as prompts in oral research - an issue of great relevance to Burma's minority communities for whom the use of indigenous place names is often a sign of geographic 'ownership' and affiliation. The Panos Oral Testimony Programme cites the following example:

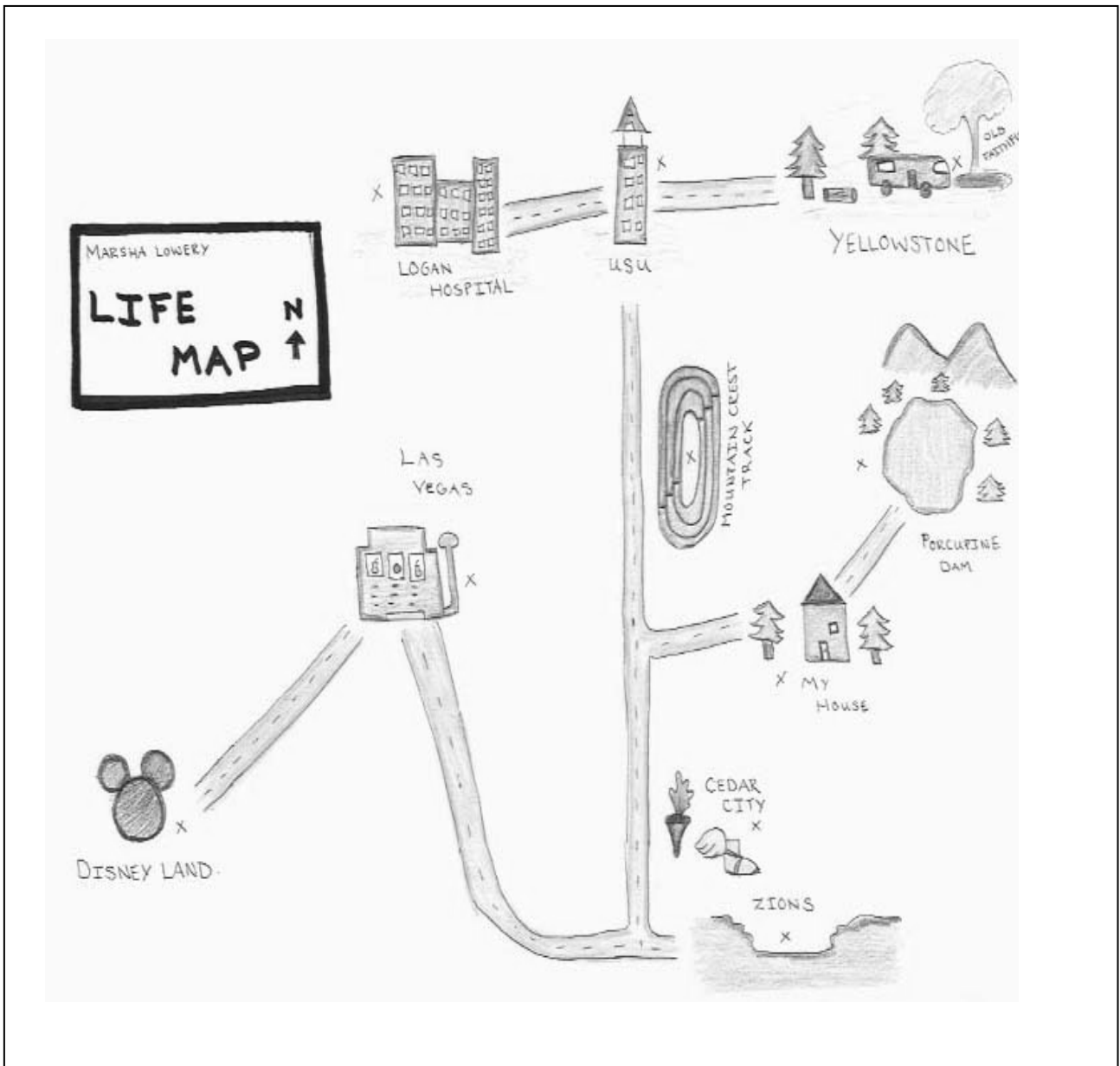
Place names

The history of place names plays a key part in landmapping surveys. These surveys vary in complexity and approach, but essentially involve asking people to draw (where possible) and describe the sites, place names, history and uses (hunting and gathering areas, water sources etc.) of all the land used by them in their lifetimes, and where possible those of their ancestors. The oral evidence gathered in this way has supported traditional peoples' claims to lands which they didn't own in the modern legal sense, but to which they do have rights.

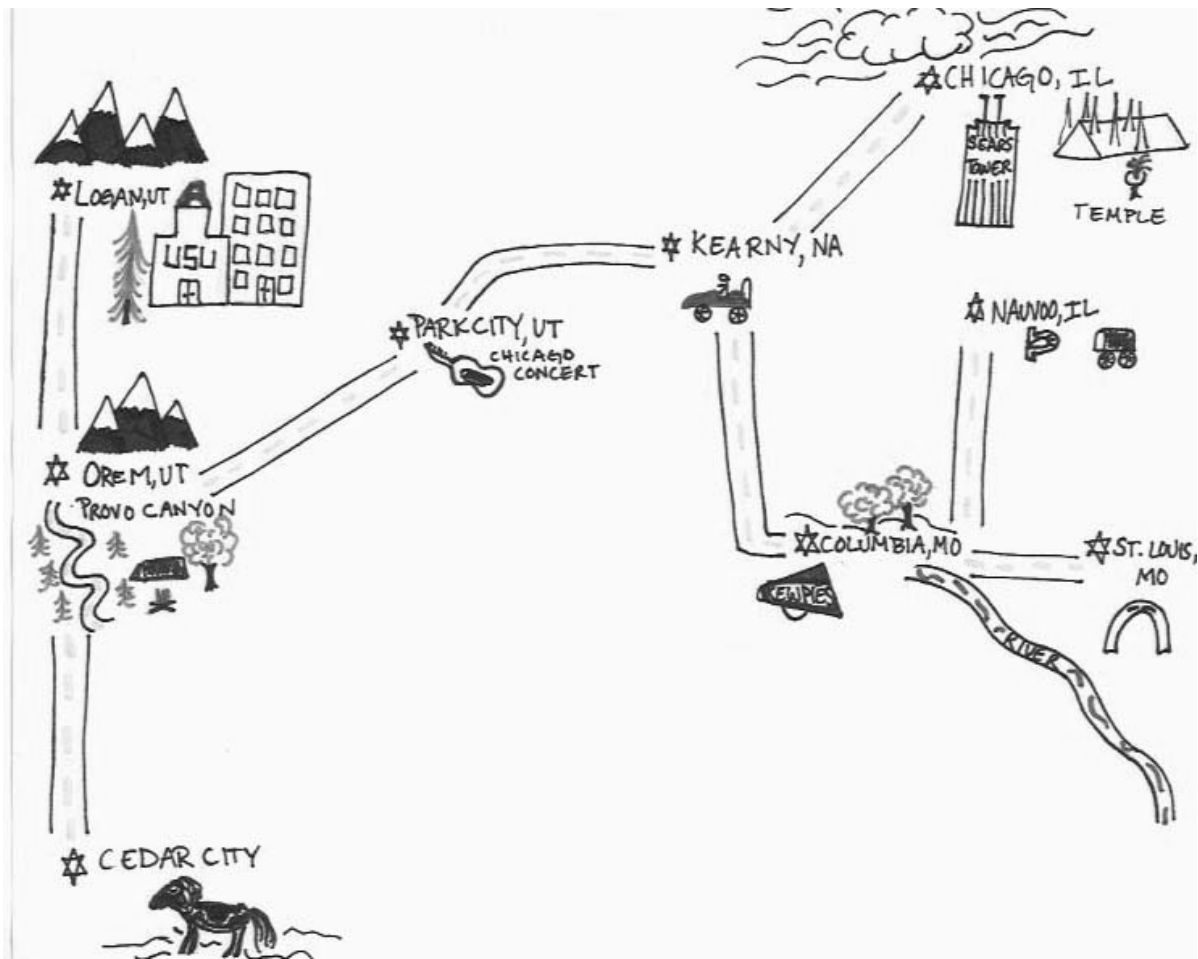
In an oral testimony project, it can be useful to pay attention to this aspect of peoples' history. Place names often tell a story, so ask about the name and its meaning. Place names may:

- ◆ *Reflect a physical feature, e.g.: a hill, a valley; or a man-made feature*
- ◆ *Be named after an individual*
- ◆ *Be named after an event*
- ◆ *Be named after something that is found there*
- ◆ *Be named after something that is/was always done there*

Sometimes the changes in place names can be revealing. In a workshop with San people in Botswana, they told how a place nearby was first known as Gantsii, which means 'round buttocks', indicating a place of plentiful food. Now the Tswana word Gantsi is being increasingly adopted (but not by the San), which means 'place of flies', a reflection of the general prejudice against bushmen and their settlements.



A 'Life Map' drawn by Marsha Lowery to assist the process of recalling significant events in her life [<http://www.usu.edu/oralhist/marsha/html>].



A 'Life Map' drawn by Shelley Fowles [<http://www.usu.edu/oralhist/shelleyf.html>].

THE INTERVIEW & THE RECORDING

You do not always have to use tape recorders to do oral research, but it is a very good idea if you do have them available. Using tape recording equipment always involves an element of technical skill and it is important for interviewers to be familiar with any equipment by **practising** with it beforehand. Make sure there are **enough batteries** for the interview. Using **rechargeable batteries** is a good idea. Problems with electricity supply will be a difficulty in most projects like this undertaken with Burma's communities, whether inside the country or outside - but it does not make it impossible. If you need to recharge batteries, however, you need to think about this beforehand to ensure that your recording efforts are not delayed some days while you wait for your equipment to be usable. **Test each piece of equipment** immediately before use.

There is a wide range of **cassette recorders** on the market. If you have the means to purchase new equipment, it is a good idea to avoid recorders with built-in **microphones**. Buy a machine with a separate socket for a microphone. You will probably be able to borrow a microphone from a local church or religious group, which may regularly use them in their community teaching. However, machines with built-in microphones are also perfectly acceptable - and have the advantage of being less intrusive. No matter how good your equipment, if the interviewer does not make efforts to ensure that background noise is reduced etc., the quality of the recording will be reduced. Always test the equipment beforehand and play back a section. If buying equipment, it is a good idea to have a **Dolby noise reduction** system and **stereo input** as both of these features tend to add to the quality of the recording, making it easier to transcribe, for example. Look for machines that have a **battery level indicator** light which shows when battery levels are running low. Try to choose a model with a **built-in speaker** as well as the facility to listen on headphones. It is extremely useful to have a **tape counter**. This can make both recording and transcribing much easier. Panos recommend that **SONY TCM-495V** and **AIWA TPVS 600** are good, solid, basic pieces of equipment that are perfectly adequate for most recording situations. These were the model numbers for 1989-99 and they can be changed by the manufacturer so check what the most recent numbers are for these models.

If you want to broadcast a recording, you will have to use better quality equipment. However, realistically, many recordings will have to be edited substantially so that a one and half hour interview can be broadcast in a five-minute slot. In this situation, it may be easier to re-record only the selected item(s).

Always choose **60 minute tapes**. Although you might feel that you are getting better value for money by buying 45 minute tapes, these are more likely to stretch and break with repeated use - such as when you are having constantly to rewind during the process of transcription. It is also easier, perhaps, to check your time by half hourly intervals. When you are very interested in what someone is saying it is easy to become distracted and to forget about the time that has passed. You may suddenly find that your tape finished some time ago and a lot of what has been said has been lost. Remember to check your tapes regularly, choosing natural breaks in the conversation, and to turn it over at appropriate times. Don't become distracted by your equipment as this can be off-putting for your interviewer.

Your machine may have a feature called **VOR - Voice Operated Recording**. The purpose of this is that the recording mechanism is triggered when it picks up the sound of a voice. In theory this should be a major advantage in this kind of work. In reality, such features do not usually react quickly enough to the sound so the beginnings of sentences are frequently cut off - which you may only discover later when transcribing the tape. **Turn OFF your VOR.**

Key points:

1. Familiarise yourself with the equipment beforehand. Choose a place, inside or out, that is quiet. Avoid noisy roads, ceiling fans, rustling plants. Direct the microphone downwind.
2. Watch the batteries and the running length of the tape.
3. **Don't** get distracted by your equipment
4. **Do** play back a few bits of conversation/chat at the very beginning and let the speaker record and play back themselves if they wish. It breaks the ice and also ensures that sound levels and recording conditions are satisfactory.

Key points: oral history and oral testimony interviews and recordings

- ◆ You need to strike a balance between your own particular interests, that of the wider project, and those of the narrator. Key qualities are **patience, enthusiasm and commitment**.
- ◆ You should know the topics well enough before the interview begins, so that you do not need to keep referring to your list during the interview.
- ◆ Take time before the interview to socialise in culturally appropriate ways. Don't rush into the recording.
- ◆ Ensure that the speaker understands the purpose of the interview, the project and what use will be made of the material. Make sure that they understand that it is not a survey but is an opportunity for them to say what they know, to give their thoughts and opinions.
- ◆ Demonstrate the tape recorder, both to check that it is working and also to break the ice by allowing the interviewer to hear the sound of their voice, and yours.
- ◆ Record the narrator's name and check with them that it is correct ('We are talking to ..., is that right? Have I pronounced your name correctly?' rather than 'What is your name?'). This can give them confidence that you know them and that it is perfectly acceptable for them to correct you at any point if necessary. Record the name, date and place at the beginning of the tape.
- ◆ Do not take too many notes during the interview as this can be distracting and may disturb the flow of the conversation. However, you may like to make notes as reminders about issues that you would like to take up again later or in another interview. It is also a good idea to clarify and write down the spellings of people or place names etc., that are unfamiliar to you but that you will have to transcribe. Should there be any significant non-verbal communications that provide information about the reaction or feelings of the speaker on certain issues, it is also a good idea, tactfully, to make a note of these.
- ◆ Do not expect to get precise dates, distances, times etc. Try to establish such things in terms that make sense personally/locally. Often significant events are

the markers by which people remember things (a famine, a flood etc.). It is possible later to date these markers more accurately.

- ◆ Be alert for references which may not be clear to someone unfamiliar with the region. These could include place names, dates, ages, references to historical events or persons, or local customs. If necessary, ask the narrator to explain these before the interview is over, or be prepared to go back later to seek clarification.
- ◆ Always try to end the interview on a positive note (do *not* ask the speaker to recall their greatest regret or their saddest memory. Always remember to ask them if they have anything to add to their narrative; something they wish to talk about which hasn't yet come up in the conversation. Don't be in a rush to leave.
- ◆ Immediately after the interview, make any necessary notes for identification and clarification. These are the results of what you have observed as well as heard. They may include explanations of difficult, old or traditional words, social customs, use of language etc. If in doubt, ask them about them before leaving. Try to explain unexpected or unconventional usage, technical terms, geographical references - anything, broadly speaking, which is locally, culturally or personally specific which would not be clear to others. Later these may be attached to the transcript.
- ◆ It is a good idea to write a brief review of the interview as soon as possible after it is finished, as a memory prompt and as a back up to the tapes. This should contain basic notes about the tape (name, age, location etc.) and some notes on the main points of the conversation, including non-verbal expressions and other observations, if relevant, and any feelings about the interview. This will also help in monitoring and evaluating the project, and perhaps learning how to improve it. It will also provide the basis for an interview summary.
- ◆ Do the transcription as soon after the interview as possible. The longer you leave it, the harder it becomes.

Oral tradition audio and visual recordings

The most significant difference that one may find if trying to record oral traditions is the amount of **pre-recording preparation** involved with the performer. In this case, 'recording' may also involve creating a **visual record** using a camera or a video, as well as an **audio record**.

Make sure that you discuss fully with the performer beforehand about the nature of the performance that is going to be recorded. **How long** will it last? Are there any significant actions or material objects that accompany or are integral to the performance. You will have to negotiate how to deal with **turning tapes over** mid-performance. This is easier with spoken or unaccompanied performances in an artificial recording setting - many performers will agree to halt temporarily while the tape is turned. In 'authentic' settings or in musical performances, such negotiation may be more difficult. If you have access to two tape recorders, that is the best way round the problem - but make sure that both work and are ready to use with tapes loaded and rewound. More equipment potentially means more mistakes so make sure that the person assigned the task is very careful in their job - that they immediately mark -up tapes removed from machines (e.g.: as No.1, No.2 etc.) so that they are not accidentally recorded over in a rush to find another tape.

It is very important that any video **camera operators** and **photographers** present are **fully briefed beforehand** about the performance and what kind of information they should seek to record. If they are simply left to mangle themselves as 'technicians' without knowledge of the performance they are recording, they are likely to miss important visual information and detail. The aesthetic interests of the recorder may be very different from the cultural interests of the project and such omissions can lead to much frustration later - for example, when a video cameraman unwittingly switches to a scenic shot of the surroundings at a key point in the performance of a ritual act.

Pt 6 - Speaking & Writing

After the Interview

- Sample summaries 1-2
- Example tape index

Transcription and Translation

- Transcription
- Translation
- Sample of transcribed and translated testimony
- Case Study - The trials of translation
- Transcription and translation of oral traditions
- Example of an oral tradition translated into a local language
- Example of an oral tradition translated into English

Photographic and Video Material

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After recording, the interview or performance must be preserved, and the first part of this process involves recording what the tapes contain - to catalogue and transcribe them. It is important to write a **summary**, which lists the main contents of the interview and notes the date, time and place of the interview, the name of the interviewer, as well as key background information on the narrator. If the facilities and funds are available, it is a good idea to make a duplicate copy which can be used for detailed transcribing and later use, while the master is stored securely. Any photographs of the narrator or other material should also accompany the summary. When funds and equipment are in short supply, it may be tempting to think that tapes can be re-used when a transcription of what it contains has been written down. In fact, the **master copy** of the tape should be treated as a historical document and never be edited or interfered with. Breaking the two small safety lugs at the top of the cassette makes it impossible to erase or record over the original. **Each cassette** should then be **marked clearly** with the interviewee's name, date of birth and a unique reference number, and place securely for storage and safe-keeping.

Sample tape cover

MBK 60 MINS Noise Reduction Tape	
Interview - Urbano Peralta, San Antonio, 08.09.20 - PS9	
Side A	Side B
Family background	History of the mines
Childhood	

Sample Summary 1 (Panos OTP) - Oral Testimony

Name: Urbano Huarcaya Peralta

PERU SUMMARY 9 (PS9)

Age: 80

Sex: Male

Occupation: *Comunero*

Location: San Antonio de Yauli

At 80 years old, Urbano has an impressive lineage. His grandparents were among the founders of Yauli and his family have been *comuneros* (titled members of the community) ever since. Like many of the elder members of these communities, he recognises the changes as a result of the mines in terms of social values, livelihoods, customs, reduced support for health care etc. In the early days, he was a porter for the mines. He also worked in the mines, on contracts, for 20 years.

He talks of the history of the mines: the finding of the Volcan mining company and of the smelting works at La Oraya which forced all the smaller mining operations to close and obliged people to move to the bigger town. He describes the polluted rivers, the effects on the livestock and the community's mostly thwarted attempts to get any real compensation from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Many of Urbano's answers are quite short (which may be a reflection of his considerable age), and the interviewer sometimes seems to labour a point - nevertheless, it is a very human interview.

p.1 of transcript - Family history

- p.2** - The animals he inherited from his parents have almost all perished from the pollution-related illness. Disappearing customs and solidarity - changing priorities of young people
- p.3** - Still an active *comunero*; history of the community: land titles lost during the war with Chile - Yauli re-recognised during 1933; the compensation for the polluted lands is a pittance
- p.4** - Description of livestock illness (lead poisoning); history of compensation agreements
- p.5** - Animals used for transportation, then trains, now heavy lorries

Sample Summary 2 - Oral History (Adapted from the Southern Oral History Program - <http://www.unc.edu/depts/sohp/fnerwin.html>)

Interviewee: Richard C. Erwin, Senior Judge, US District Court, North Carolina

Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier

Interview Date: June 29th, 1995

Location: Winston-Salem, NC

Tape No.: 6.29.95-RE (cassette 1 of 1) (approximate length 55 minutes)

The interviewee:

Richard C. Erwin, now a Senior Judge on the United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina, has been a leading African American figure in state political and judicial affairs since the mid-1970s. Erwin was born in 1923, attended the public schools of Marion, NC, and later graduated from Johnson C. Smith University (1947) and Howard Law School (1951). From 1951-1977, Erwin was in private practice in Winston-Salem, NC. ... In December 1977, Governor Jim Hunt appointed Erwin as the first African American ever to serve on the NC Court of Appeals. ... In 1980, Erwin was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the Federal District Court. After encountering the opposition of Senator Jesse Helms, Erwin was confirmed by the US Senate and became the first African American federal judge in NC history.

The interviewer:

Joseph Mosnier is a graduate student in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill. ... Mosnier was selected by the SOHP to perform this interview on account of his familiarity with the state's black leadership and political history since the 1950s.

Description of the interview:

The interview was conducted in the Judge's chambers in the Federal Building in Winston-Salem, NC. The room was quiet and there were no interruptions. Erwin noted at the outset that he had recently had dental implant done, and his speech is slightly slowed as a result. Unfortunately, the interview remained at a fairly superficial level; I could not elicit from Judge Erwin the sort of detail I had hoped he might provide about developments in state political history since 1965. He never opened up that much, perhaps he felt the need as a sitting federal judge to remain 'above the fray'; by the close of the interview I was feeling somewhat stymied. The interview does not break much new ground. At times the judge referred to a folder of news clippings about his political career, leading to occasional pauses in his responses.

Content of the interview:

Substantively, the interview was organized around three major themes: the evolution of black political activity in North Carolina since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the re-emergence of the state Republican Party in these years, and the increasing prominence of certain cultural issues in the state's politics in the same period. The interview proceeds through these matters in roughly chronological fashion, with a focus on Judge Erwin's political involvements.

Subject headings:

North Carolina Politics and Government; African Americans in Politics; North Carolina Republican Party; Civil Rights; Desegregation; Judges, North Carolina Court of Appeals; Jim Hunt; Jesse Helm

The important thing to remember about summaries, no matter what format you use, is that their primary purpose is to **make the interview accessible** to those who are going to use the material. Thus the things you choose to highlight, and the degree of detail you go into, should reflect individual project needs. The best summaries are those which, once read, quickly bring to mind the character, and any strengths and weaknesses of the interview, and from which you can easily locate mention of particular topics, or important or interesting passages. Less successful ones exhibit two failings: they tend to go into too much detail about the content, exhaustively noting every reference and subject covered, even if that mention is too brief or passing to be of great value, and/or they fail to get into the spirit of the interview and pick up interesting aspects or nuances. Of course, some interviews are less successful than others, and summaries should indicate any limitations of technique or content as well.

However, if you are also hoping to make an archive of material for more general use, you may need to be quite comprehensive in how you catalogue your material yet people may not want to read through every summary that you have to find references to topics that interest them. A good way of dealing with the need to provide comprehensive, but brief, accounts of the contents of an archive when people are accessing it may be solved by the use of **indexing**. This might take two forms: a **tape index** and/or a **card index**. Videos and tapes also need to be indexed and catalogued/archived.

A **card index** might be organised in a number of ways, but it is likely to be of most use if it is organised by topic. A card(s) for each topic will detail the appropriate tapes in which interviews deal with this particular topic. This can then be cross-referenced with more detailed information from the tape summary or the tape index, or the full transcript. Keeping an index up to date can be time consuming and rather boring. If you have access to a computer, it is very easy to make a database using key words. Microsoft **Access** software can be used, if necessary, which is a relatively simple database program.

A **tape index** can also be a time consuming task, but it brings great benefits when later trying to access the archive. Below is an extract of the (very comprehensive) tape index of the interview with Judge Erwin, cited as an example of a tape summary on the previous page. Note how the use of a tape counter makes the job of writing a tape index much easier. Examples of photograph and video indexes are given afterwards.

Example: Tape Index

(adapted from <http://www.unc.edu/depts/sohp/fnerwin.html>)

Cassette 1 of 1, Side A - Tape No. 6.29.95 -RE

Counter	Index Topic
1	[opening announcement]
8	Erwin's election to and work on the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School Board, 1961-68. Segregation and desegregation
42	Public service involvement; United Methodist Church
49	Merger of City and County school systems
66	Defence of people on sit-ins
77	Response to passage of Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965
86	Nature of black political organisation in the mid-1960s in North Carolina
117	Reginald Hawkins's 1968 race for the NC Governorship
133	Attitude in 1968
147	Governor Robert Scott - 1971 invitation to Erwin to serve on the State Board of Education
164	Reaction to the Swann decision of 1971
177	Race as a factor in State politics
181	Reflections on Skipper Bowles and Holhouser's 1972 victory
211	Jesse Helms' use of the slogan 'He's One of Us' in the 1972 Senate Campaign
227	Democrat Party interpretations of events of 1972
243	Jim Hunt's emergence as a political figure
267	Erwin's decision to run for state assembly in 1975 - recruitment by local Democratic Party leaders and his campaign
357	Impression of the General Assembly and details of service
400	Erwin's assessment of Holhauser as Governor
410	Recollections about the small group of key black political leaders in Raleigh in the mid-1970s
467	Assessment of experience of serving in the House
478	Details of re-election in 1976)

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

Whether or not an interview is likely to be used in its original language, for example for a community history or education project, it should be **transcribed from the tape in that language**, and any translations prepared from that written text.

Sometimes it may be decided that the interviewer can translate from the tape directly into another main language, for example when the language of interview is one for which there is no written form. If transcription has to be into another language, the original tape should always be kept, so that at any later stage, direct transcription will still be possible. In a couple of projects where this occurred, Panos found keeping the original-language tape was also vital because some interviewers were not entirely confident in the language of transcription. A more fluent speaker was then able to work with the interviewer, double-checking the tape against the translation and correcting it where necessary.

Transcription

Transcription is a lengthy process: it takes from **5 to 10 hours** to transcribe **one hour of recorded speech**. Despite this, do not be tempted to cut corners. Transcription should be as accurate (word-for-word) as possible - a summary of what was said will not be acceptable, as it will lose its colour, individuality and "oral" character, and can easily distort or misrepresent the speaker's real meaning. Always include the questions as well as the answers. This means it will be obvious where leading questions have been used, for example, and this might throw a different perspective on the narrator's reply.

If time permits, listen to the tape at least once before tackling transcription, and read the summary details, and any notes or review of the interview you made at the time. It will remind you of the content and the flavour of the interview, and the narrator's main concerns. People don't always talk in a structured and logical order, and having a sense of the overall interview may help you to make sense of some comments etc. which may seem puzzling or out of context, but which are in fact linked to earlier or later passages.

If at all possible, transcribe using a word processor rather than typewriter. Put the interview number and the basic biographical details at the beginning, so that if the text ever gets separated from a summary sheet, that information is still easily established. Start with **Tape 1, SIDE A**, and make sure the tape counter on your machine is at **000**.

Then put the tape counter number at the top of every page (e.g.: 088), or even more frequently (for example, at a change of topic or an especially significant section). Indicate when you change sides and tapes. Doing this now will save lots of time later if you or anyone else wants to locate particular sections on the tape, as you simply wind the tape back until you find that number on the tape counter.

It is good to introduce an interview with a couple of sentences which set the scene. Note down any observations which you feel are important for anyone reading the interview. This should precede the actual interview.

Ideally all transcribers in a project should **follow the same style**. A common approach is to put questions in bold, and put an extra line between each question and answer. Some indent the narrator's text for extra clarification. Some like to indicate the speakers with Q and A (but the narrator could ask a question); others use I and R or N (interviewer and Respondent or Narrator); still others use the speaker's initials. If you follow the bold and indented style, it may not be necessary to use anything, unless there is more than one narrator, in which case initials should be used at the beginning of each bit of speech. Another example of transcription style is given later. You may choose whatever style is easiest and clearest for your transcribers.

As far as possible, the transcriber should try to reflect the **narrator's style** and **rhythm of speech**, and can use dashes, dots and commas to do this. **Single dashes** indicate **pauses** within sentences. **Three dots** indicate where a sentence or phrase is left **unfinished**. Comments by the interviewer/transcriber which indicate **emotions** or actions should be in **round brackets**, e.g.: (laughs) or (shows photograph). Where the interviewer/transcriber is adding information for **clarification**, **square brackets** should be used e.g.: " it was the time of that festival I mentioned earlier [Holi] and we went to the city [Vernnasi]".

Metaphors, proverbs and other words or phrases which are not easily understood, should be written down literally first. Where necessary, an explanation of the meaning can be added in brackets. The same approach should also be used when translating such phrases: literal meaning first; explanation in brackets. Also where a locally specific word doesn't have an exact equivalent, it is sufficient to explain it literally once (in brackets), and thereafter use the local word. Explanations of local references and any other relevant descriptions of the context of the interview should be attached to the text and sent with it to your local project co-ordinator.

Translation

One of Panos' partners, the **Kenyan Oral Literature Association**, gather and publishes material in a number of different languages. They distinguish between **three kinds of translation**:

- ◆ **Literal** - word for word
- ◆ **Direct translation** - sense for sense - where the translation is more idiomatic than purely literal
- ◆ **Paraphrase** - core of the meaning only

The second kind (sense for sense) requires skill and sensitivity, but can yield a text which does most justice to the original. Paraphrasing the meaning is NOT acceptable, since the aim of oral testimony projects is to present material which is as close to the narrator's original words as possible. If a translator starts to paraphrase or summarise, it is all too easy to lose important shades of meaning. For example, the translator may leave out things which seem unimportant to him/her, but might be highly significant to the narrator.

Usually the first, more literal approach to translation is used, especially when translators lack experience. In this situation it is important above all else to emphasise the need for **accuracy**. A skilled editor can often take the awkwardness

out of a translation, but they can not put back accuracy if the text has been paraphrased, edited or cut. Indeed, a less polished version may be truer to the spirit of the original. If a translator decides to cut corners, and puts down what they think the narrator must have meant, there is a real danger of **misrepresentation**.

It is much better that wherever there is **ambiguity** or **confusion**, the translator makes that clear (putting their comment in brackets). They should not be afraid to indicate where rendering the meaning was difficult or likely to be inadequate. The tape, the transcript, and the translation (albeit to lesser extent) all stand as master versions against which any other use of the testimonies can, if necessary, be checked - for example, to ensure that a quote used out of context does reflect its original meaning. Ultimately, it is important to be realistic, and honest, about the inevitable degree of filtering through others that a narrator's account is likely to undergo - from interviewer to transcriber to translator - to do your best to keep this to a minimum.

A sample page from a transcribed and translated testimony conducted by one of Panos' partners follows. This sample page was chosen by them at random by and there was some difficulty with the translation of the interview, as is noted. This sample page does, however, provide a good example of how a transcribed interview could look. Following this is a case study from *Listening for a Change*, which gives more detailed information about some of the difficulties and concerns that may arise with this aspect of your work.

Sample page from a transcribed and translated testimony

Name: Amador Pérez Mandujano

PERU 16

Sex: Male

Age: 51

Occupation: Carpenter/owns a small business

Location: La Oroya

Today we are with Don Amador Pérez Mandujano. Don Amador is originally from La Oroya, where he still lives. He knows a lot about the history of Oroya, but especially about the daily life of this community, which has suffered a lot because of the fumes from the foundry. We are now going to chat with Don Amador.

[Translator's note: He uses many Quecha words in his Spanish, sometimes making it difficult to give English equivalents and keep flavour of the original. He often talked in the present tense when speaking of the past.]

Side A 000

I: Could you tell us something about your family history? Are your parents and grandparents from Oroya?

R: Yes, Senor, it is an honor for me to be able to communicate with you about different aspects of life in Oroya: some are good and others are not so good, like the fumes and the *relaves* (waste/tailings). For me it has been a painful experience because of the changes in the area, starting in the time of my grandparents, because of the situation created by the company.

I: Where are your grandparents from?

R: My grandparents are from La Oroya. They are real *oriyonos*, from San Jerónimo of Oroya, a *campesino* community of this area La Oroya. My parents are from Huyanacanchas, they are of Tarma by origin. But they have lived most of their life in La Oroya.

Truly they have suffered a lot in their lives because of the mining company, the former Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation, because of the fumes. And those are real stories, not invented ones. These are the stories that are real and palpable. According to the stories of my ancestors, my elders told me and have experienced this from 1944 until today. When the former Cerro de Pasco began to operate with its chimneys and its fumes in the region of Yauli-La Oroya, it was a way of not respecting people's dignity, because the *oroyinos* of San Jerónimo used to work with the livestock and some with agriculture. In those times of the year 1949 - I cannot testify an exact date - even the potatoes that were planted were practically destroyed [by the pollution] and nothing could be harvested. Most of the highland animals began to die from an unknown disease, according to the story of my grandparents. All of this changed their lives. So my parents, in 1919 or 1920, with more experience and at the age of approximately 18 to 20, told us that the fumes were something bad that affected the residents themselves, and that the situation was critical. As you can tell, the situation did not allow you to have a good experience.

I: And your father, what did he work in? Did he work for the foundry, and in the construction of the foundry?

R: No, no, he did not work in that. He thought that if you went to the Company it was as if you were serving the enemy. Maybe it was an exaggeration, but he thought of it that way. But sincerely it was not like that. The development of our nation was due also to mining.

Case Study: The Trials of Translation

Most development projects recording oral testimony are sooner or later faced with the issue of translation. The answer to some key questions- who is to benefit from the project? how is the material to be used? what other audiences do we wish to reach? - will dictate which languages are required and what the translation and transcription procedures should be. A project that aims to influence policy matters may need testimonies recorded in a local language to be translated into both the national, official language (for example, Arabic) and the national, international language (for example English or French).

Since both transcription and translation are time-consuming processes, the question of how many layers of language are needed becomes very important. In the Sahel Oral History Project [in Africa] most tapes were transcribed directly into English or French by the interviewers, on the grounds that there was no immediate use for a written version in the local language, which was anyway preserved on tape. But in the same project, transcriptions have been made subsequently in Soninke (Senegal) and Hausa (Niger), as part of literacy programmes.

Providing the interviewers can speak both the local language and the national language, it makes sense for them to translate the interviews, either from their own transcripts or directly from the tape. But translation is a skilful process, it involves capturing the spirit and flavour of expression as well as recognising the need to interpret the ambiguities of proverbs, or render vernacular names into recognisable equivalents.

In Ethiopia, where SOS Sahel is using oral testimony as part of a research project into food security issues, the complexities of translation are well illustrated. The research was conducted in Wolaitinya, the language of the Wolaita people of south west Ethiopia. Although the interviewers were fluent in Wolaitinya, they could not transcribe the tapes into the local language because all their schooling had been conducted in Amharic, but the project required English versions. As the interviewers were not fluent in English, a second translator had to translate from the Amharic. SOS Sahel decided to have a few of the same interviews translated by two potential translators in an attempt to arrive at the closest and leave nothing out and to remain as close to the original as possible. Although the extracts below are extreme examples of the divergence in approach, they are by no means unrepresentative of the problems which can arise.

Thus, in answer to the question: Are there species of tree other than eucalyptus?

Version 1: Eucalyptus is most useful. There is also "wanza" but that requires a lot of care and so only a few people have "wanza". Eucalyptus can be planted in soils like this. You can also plant pine but it grows very slowly. Other trees are good for firewood only. A pine like this one makes a good shade. "Zagba" is also very good for shade. Pine has thorny leaves, worst during the dry season. You have got shoes so you don't notice it, but its pricks hurt our children's feet.

Version 2: Eucalyptus is most important. There are other trees as well, for example "Wanza" (*Syzgium guinense*). But many farmers do not have these trees. Since the introduction of eucalyptus, the planting of other trees has declined. This is true as far as I can remember. Other trees are used only for firewood. Junipers are thorny especially in the dry months; you don't feel it because you are wearing shoes. I don't feel it either now because the ground is wet.

Version 2 gives the Latin names and is more "fluent", but it fails to describe soil conditions, or attribute the lack of popularity of "wanza" to its slow growth. And it has lost the children! Some of the difference of approach in the translation could have been avoided with clearer instructions on, for example, how to translate local names. Different problems are raised in this next example. Question: Are there employment opportunities in the area?

Version 1: everyone is free to be employed and earn about 3 *birr* a day. But this is good only for people that do not have family responsibility. Otherwise it is better to till the land and feed the family.

Version 2: There are those who are willing to hire their labour and there are those who prefer to till their land. The latter are concerned about their own production so that their families will not be exposed to hunger and famine. The former are usually single, or have no children, or are young men who want to help their families. As for me, I prefer to work on my land. Take, for example, the road rehabilitation where one earns 3 birr a day. This is about enough for three days, on the basis of a diet of having one banana a day.

Version 1 fails to distinguish between the motivation and status of wage labourers, and has lost the bananas. Perhaps the translator had grown tired and decided to cut corners. Yet at other points in this particular trial translation the lack of detail in the two transcripts was reversed, illustrating how difficult it is to pick the "best" version.

The translator of version 2 identified a key problem: "The attempt at faithful translation has not been successful because the text was void of much meaning, so I operated on the basis of 'oh, he (the interviewer/transcriber) must have meant this when he wrote that!'. Also, his Amharic is not so good anyway". A university researcher, he produced the most fluent version, obviously editing and smoothing out the rough edges of the original. The translator of version 1 was himself a Wolaitinya speaker. His version was less polished, but on the whole closer to the flavour of the original.

Transcription and translation of oral traditions

The problems of transcription and translation may be particularly acute in relation to oral traditions. Literal translation of a song or a poem, or of a narrative in which a lot of repetition takes place as a memory aid to the performer, may have the effect of undermining the aesthetic, rhythmic or creative value of these performances. When written down, they may appear crude or long-winded. Translating such creative works to convey the meaning and beauty of the language is very difficult - but as many oral traditions are recited using language that is not readily understandable today, translation is essential if one wishes to make the material accessible. The language of translation may be a particular problem. If one chooses to translate the text into the local community language, to what extent may this limit the readership given the lower levels of literacy in community languages? If one chooses to translate into Burmese, what effect will this have upon the text? If one chooses to translate into English (or Thai), what are your reasons for doing so? And how will you overcome the problems of cultural understanding in such a translation?

Recently, a book was produced in Rangoon by the Kachin community concerning one of their oral traditions recited at weddings - the *Lanyi*. The language of the recitation is very difficult for ordinary Kachin people to understand and so the book was produced by presenting a translation into modern Jinghpaw followed by a full transcript in the traditional language. Each section has an introduction in which the author explains the context of that section of the recitation and gives some interpretation of it. Where further explanation about a particular word or custom is needed, this is included as a footnote. The two versions have been given line numbers so that people can follow the traditional and modern language, line by line. Alternatively you can mark phrase by phrase [*see below*]. Because the tune of the recitation is also important, a tape is included which gives some of the atmosphere of the performance and also gives an extract of the recitation as it was performed. Where special devices have been used to assist in the recitation, they have been included in the text (for example, starting a new phrase with 'Aw...'). However, because this might cause confusion for people unfamiliar with the tune, the tape also helps them understand the relationship between the text and the performance. This is a very effective way of presenting such material - it is time consuming to do, but it ensures that a record of considerable long term value is created.

Example of an oral tradition from Burma transcribed and translated into a local language

In the following brief example, a selection of text has been transcribed and then translated into modern Jinghpaw. Because the transcription accompanies the translation, and because there was also an accompanying tape, the translation has tended to focus on conveying meaning rather than replicating the rhythm and poetry of the language. Here the text has been divided into two columns, and a face-to-face translation can sometimes be helpful for the reader. However, it can also lead to a lot of blank paper in cases where the translation is not literal and meaning can properly be expressed more succinctly. Footnotes have been included to explain specific points of language or custom.

Traditional Lanyi language

1. Aw ... mayat gaw ginrung gawn na ni law e nga, mayat shingtung gawn na law e nga, ... gumsan¹ e urang shaga na ni law e nga, ... mayat goi gindung yawn na law e ngu. 2. Zinghkum la ni a law e ngu, ... Tsit hkum gaw kashu ni a law e nga, ... tsing man aja ni a law e nga. 3. Kashu goi e ningtsing wa gaw law e nga, ... mayat gindung yawn na gaw ginla na gaw e nga. Jahkring sha manang ni² e law e nga,... 4. Zinghkum la ni a law e nga, ... katsen gaw gailung ma ni a law e nga ... mayat ningnam waji matsun gawn na law e nga.

Modern Colloquial Jinghpaw

1. Aw ... mayat maya ai maumwi labau hpe hkai chye ai maumwi sara sa shaga na ga ai law, shing rai mayat maya hpang wa ai maumwi gawn na rai ga ai. 2. Nhkum du wa a kashu kasha amyu matu ni a le. 3. Kashu daw ai wa ngai hku nna lanyi sara sa shaga yu saga oi. 4. Nhkum wa Nhkum jan ni a mayat maya sa wa ai maumwi labau gawn ai laman hta rau sha jawm kanawn ai ni rai nga ga ai i.

-
1. Kaga ni hta jan jan re ai, san san laklai ai, lata san da ai
 2. Shadawn shadang hku kanawn ang ai ni, aten langai myi hta manang tai ang ai ni, lanyi ai laman e hpung langai myi tai ai ni, ndai zawn sadi njaw nga yang poi ngut mat tim n hka hkraw nna manghkang byin wa lu ai

Example of an oral tradition from Burma translated into English

Below is the same piece of text translated into English. As the translation focuses on conveying meaning, it is non-literal. No attempt has been made to convey the rhythm or poetry of the original and such information would have to be included as introductory commentary to establish the context of the original, and the relationship of the translation to the original. Some words from the original are not easily translatable into English, but the sense has been conveyed. It has been necessary to include different information in the footnotes to make the translation understandable to a non-local audience:

We must invite someone to this wedding who knows the history of the multiplication of all living things; someone who can relate to us the story of how all things increase from generation to generation. Tonight we are in the company of the descendants of the great and respected Nhkum¹ chiefs. I myself am a grandson² of one of the Nhkum chiefs, so let me invite the joiwa³ to come and join us on this occasion. We shall all then join together in temporary fellowship⁴ while the history of the Nhkum clan's marriage line is related.

1. The Nhkum clan is one of the main Jinghpaw clans which had chiefs. These chiefs traditionally believed that they had marriage relations with high level spirits and they claim that this gave them the right to perform such recitations at weddings
2. *Kashu kasha* - this is not a blood-line grandson, but a term that is used for a kinship relationship in which one is *connected* by marriage.
3. The *joiwa* was the spirit priest who could narrate the 'Creation Story' at a **manau** and also a marriage recitation at a wedding. It is a term only used in reference to the most skilled spirit priests.
4. It is very important that the *joiwa* and his assistants convey to the spirits that they are only united for the purposes of making this recitation and that afterwards they will be separated. If they fail to end this relationship after the recitation, this could lead to their misfortune and possibly death.

PHOTOGRAPHIC & VIDEO MATERIAL

It is a good idea, when you can, to incorporate a visual record with your oral material. It is very interesting actually to see a person whose voice or words we may become familiar with. Photographs may also be a useful component of any historical book or text that you may be intending to write, and both video and photographs may be incorporated in an archive. Finally, as a visual record to accompany oral traditions, the information that photographs and video may provide can provide essential extra information that might prove essential in helping us to understand the context of the performance taking place. It is very frequently to be found that oral performances incorporate action either as an integral part of the performance or simply to illustrate it. It was mentioned previously that any such recording necessitates that the person taking the photographs or video be fully briefed about the nature of the performance so that they will not miss key pieces of visual information.

When making any kind of visual, it is very important that the images are properly labelled. The information can be marked on the back of the photograph, as long as doing so **does not cause any damage**. You should note some or all of the following:

1. Date of the photograph
2. The location of the photograph
3. The name of the photographer - this is useful information so that people can track down records on archives and other collections
4. Names of any people in the photograph, in the order in which they appear, recorded in such a way as to not confuse anyone at a later date
5. The ages of the people, if known
6. The circumstances around which the photograph was taken
7. If there is an original negative, this should be cross-referenced and kept safely
8. If the photograph is a copy of an original, where the original is located

Cataloguing photographs and videos

You might want to archive, catalogue and index photographs on a larger scale. Then it is a good idea to use a code for reference. Below is an example of index notes on photographs taken to record ritual practices accompanying the performance of oral tradition at a funeral in Shwegu, Burma. Make sure that you give all your photographs a reference number. What follows is just one example of a way that you can catalogue your photographs. Choose a way that seems logical for your collection, and then be consistent:

HHT/PF1 - 1. 4.4.98. Family members, friends and the recording team travelling by boat from Katha to Shwegu.

HHT/PF1 - 2. 4.4.98. Arriving at Shwegu by boat. The mooring area is on the right of the picture.

You can see that a reference system has been used for each photograph.. The explanation of the reference system used here is:

- **HHT/PF** = the code number given to photographs of this event to make sure that they are not confused with others
- **1 - 1** = the first number is the number for **the roll of film**, the second number is the number of **the negative on that film**. Therefore, photograph 35 on roll 7 would have the number **7 - 35**.
- **The date** should be included
- A brief **summary** of what is in the picture - **who** is in it, **where** it was taken, **when** it was taken (morning, afternoon etc., **what** is happening.

It is also important to catalogue and index any video material. What may be obvious to you in a video, may not be obvious to others. You should include the same kind of information about any video material that you have as you would for photographs. Because the images are moving, you will have to catalogue the information and the images according to a tape counter or a timer. If you use a tape counter, be aware that they may vary quite considerably from machine to machine. The example below is from a video taken at a funeral in Kachin State. Time has been noted, not a counter reading. There are many different ways of cataloguing this material. Again, choose the most logical way for your material and then be consistent.

TIME	MAIN SUBJECT	ACTION	OBJECTS
00.00	Boat on river	Journey	boat
01.45	Village and funeral house	scene	scene
02.14	Myihto altars, building karoi, putting up flags, splitting bamboo, hkinjawng	pre-funeral activity	hkung-ri etc.
04.36	Painting hkarang du-u, numjang and laka u pyek leng	painting	hkarang du-u etc.

05.14	House post, house beam	scene	house
05.57	Hkinjawng at work	hkinjawng	offering
06.33	Erecting karoi / dawnghkawng	karoi	karoi flags
07.39	Painting hkarang du-u, making kaprep	painting	hkarang du-u, kaprep
09.18	Karoi	scene	karoi
11.01	Painting hkarang du-u etc.	painting	hkarang du-u
ETC.			

It is also useful to write a fuller description of a video tape, subdivided scene by scene if the contents of the material warrant it. Remember though, you are simply helping people to access the material - such a catalogue does not have to be as detailed as a tape transcript.

Pt 7 - Lasting Voices

Looking After and Preserving Your Materials

- Preserving paper
- Preserving photographs
- Preserving VCR tapes
- Summary of key points for preserving your materials

Using Electronic Media to Preserve and Store Your Materials

- Using scanners and scanning
- Some basics about converting audio and video to CD

Working With Your Materials

LOOKING AFTER & PRESERVING YOUR MATERIALS²⁶

Preserving paper

Since the 1860s most paper has been made from wood pulp. This reduced the cost of production but it also meant that there were chemicals present in the paper that had not been found before - notably the presence of **acid**. Acid is what causes paper to slowly **turn brown** and **become brittle**, and eventually disintegrate into small pieces.

Different paper deteriorates at different rates depending on the exact nature of the chemicals used in its manufacture. For example, **newspapers** are usually made from quite cheap paper and they therefore tend to decay quite quickly - even after ten years they may show significant amounts of deterioration and appear aged. Without careful storage, any paper will have deteriorated significantly after fifty years or so.

A particular problem created by the acid in paper is that the acid from lower quality paper affects that of any other paper with which it is stored. For example, if a newspaper cutting is kept with a letter, after some years a brown stain may appear on the letter where it has been in contact with the clipping. The stain is a problem not only because of discoloration but also because the acid which has caused it will also make the paper more brittle.

There are four main enemies of paper:

1. **Heat** - this dramatically increases the rate of the chemical reaction and speeds deterioration
2. **Humidity** - humidity levels above 70% cause the growth of mold and dramatic changes can cause the paper to 'cycle', which means that it expands and contracts as it absorbs and then loses water into its fibres
3. **Light** - bright light, including both **sunlight** and **fluorescent** lights (which are so popular in homes in Burma) can both damage paper. Ultra violet light from the sun can speed up chemical reactions in the paper, and bright light will cause ink to fade and gradually disappear

²⁶Adapted from information in the Clarke Historical Library Preservation site '*Preserving Memories: Caring for your Heritage*' at <http://www.lib.cmich.edu/clarke/pres.html>, New York State Library, '*Genealogy: Hints for preserving Family Collections*' at <http://unix2.nysed.gov/genealogy/hints.html>, '*Protecting Family Memories from Time*' at <http://www.genealogy.com/10-prsrv.html> and '*Restoring Damaged Photographs*' by David Mishkin at <http://www.genealogy.com/10-restr.html> and '*Experts give tips for preserving photos*' by Montana State University - Bozeman Communications Services at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/univ/photos.html>

4. **Careless handling** - this is a particular problem, especially when people are not fully acquainted with the (potential) importance of a document. It is also true that people from Burma tend to handle paper and books in ways that seem to have been learned socially and culturally. Such ways of handling paper are not, it may surprise you to learn, universal! For example, the top corners of a page are usually pinched together and creased when thumbing through a book, no matter what its age, as if a degree of rough handling adds an air of seriousness to the task; printing and spelling errors are marked and corrected in pen; the place reached when reading a book is usually marked by folding the top half of the page over etc. - all these ways of handling lessen the life span of the document.

Should you try to restore damaged documents yourself?

The simple answer to this is 'NO'. You may make matters worse

- ◆ **DO NOT USE SELF-ADHESIVE TAPE** to repair ripped or torn paper. Most tapes only last for five to ten years and will then fall off - but in the process they may tear the paper further and will discolour it in such a way that even the most expert paper restorer will face difficulties removing it.
- ◆ **DO NOT LAMINATE DOCUMENTS** - lamination does not lengthen the life of the document and the sticky plastic coating is very difficult to remove. Some professional restorers 'encapsulate' documents between two plastic sheets. But this is different to lamination because the paper is not attached to the sheets, which are only sealed around the edges

Generally, do not attempt any restoration of documents - paper, photographs, etc. BUT do not despair if you feel that an important document appears to be *beyond repair* - when placed in professional hands, it is amazing what can be done to conserve and/or restore even the most faded of pictures and the most brittle of pieces of paper.

Paper preservation tips

- ◆ Try to store paper records in a place that is generally cool and dry - avoid places that get very damp or humid or very hot and dry
- ◆ Do not store paper in the roof of a house or near ground level if it is damp
- ◆ Always store paper away from bright light

- ◆ If you choose to frame and display a paper document, ensure that it is away from direct sunlight and bright light. Make sure that there is a small gap between the item and the glass of the frame. Do not leave it on display permanently but remove it and replace it with something else at intervals
- ◆ Store papers opened and flat, not folded
- ◆ Separate 'bad' pieces of paper from others by sandwiching the 'bad' paper between two blank sheets of quality paper
- ◆ Never use sticky tape on a document
- ◆ Never laminate a document

Preserving photographs

The act of making a photograph is in itself a complex chemical reaction involving a light source. Because of this, no photograph is completely stable and will always react to light to some degree, and may react quite rapidly and unpredictably to chemicals. Photographs are made up of several layers. The top layer contains the image suspended in gelatin (purified animal protein) - this is called the **emulsion layer**. This layer is coated onto a **base layer** of photographic paper or film. A middle layer of **adhesive** is used to make the emulsion stick to the base.

Damage may occur to different layers of the photograph for different reasons, which will in turn affect the whole image. For example, because the emulsion layer is made of organic materials, heat and high humidity promote the growth of mold and fungi on it. The gelatin also softens and becomes sticky as it retains moisture. However, if the humidity is too low (below 25%), the emulsion layer may crack and the base material may curl. Some people recommend keeping colour photos and film in particular in a refrigerator, because the cooler the conditions are, the better. However, if the humidity in the refrigerator is high (which tends to be the case with most) this does not help much - unless measures can be taken to control the humidity, for example by placing something inside that will absorb part of the moisture. Some photographers use dessicators to dry the air which change colour when they have absorbed all the liquid that they can. They can then be dried out and re-used. You might know of some natural materials to do this.

All photographs fade over time. Although carefully stored black and white photographs may last for more than a century, colour photographs are very susceptible to colour change and fading because of their chemical make-up. These changes may be noticeable after only ten to fifteen years - but colour pictures taken on ordinary Polaroid or other 'instant' developing photographs may fade noticeably even more quickly. Pollutants in the air can also cause damage - especially tobacco smoke, car exhaust fumes, salty sea air and dust. Avoid placing photographs in cupboards that contain cleaning products as the fumes may cause a chemical reaction on the photograph. Similarly, remove photographs from rooms freshly painted with an oil-based paint for at least a month.

Photographs suffer from the same enemies as paper:

1. **Heat** - colour film lasts longest when kept at temperatures of about 40 degrees fahrenheit.
2. **Humidity**
3. **Light** - because photographic images are found on light sensitive materials, they can never be made totally stable
4. **Mishandling** - even the oils from a person's hands, if left on a photographic print or negative, can eventually cause fingerprints to become permanently embedded in the image. Common household items such as ink, staples, paper clips, glue and tape may all damage photographs and should be avoided. Use photo corners to hold photographs in place, or cut slits in the mounting paper through which the edges of the photograph can be placed. Don't do anything that cannot be undone.

Photograph preservation tips

- ◆ Never store photographs, film or negatives in the roof of a house or at its base as this makes them vulnerable to changes in temperature, humidity and damp
- ◆ Never store prints and negatives in contact with each other - they can stick to each other and any residual chemicals on one may cause a reaction on another. Store each in a separate piece of paper or plastic enclosure with interleaving sheets of high quality paper
- ◆ Choose photograph albums with great care. Ironically, many mass-produced photo albums contain photo-damaging materials. Cheap albums tend to make use of high-acid materials which will affect the pictures. In particular, make sure that the plastic cover over the picture will not stick to the picture when it gets humid - or else at these times, for example during the rainy season, make sure that you check your pictures to ensure that no mold is growing on them
- ◆ Have copies made of your photographs while they are still in good condition. Display copies rather than the originals
- ◆ Black and white photographs tend to be more stable if printed as toned prints. This process changes the metallic silver of the image to a form that

is more resistant to oxidising gases. The photographs then have a brownish or purplish tone. However, as previously stated, **if you are going to scan these images onto a computer, do not save them as colour/toned images, save them as monochromes so that they take up less space [see below].**

- ◆ If you have black and white negatives and prints made from colour prints, these will last longer than the colour original
- ◆ Consider storing your photographs electronically by scanning the photos or the negatives
- ◆ Always hold prints and negatives by the edges. Light (lint free gloves) are perfect for handling if you have them
- ◆ Do not expose the photo or the negative to bright light for extended periods of time
- ◆ Use high quality colour negative film and paper to take and print colour photographs. Independent tests suggest that the following negative films marketed for the amateur market are among the best: **Fujicolor Super G 200**, **Konica Color Super SR 200 3M**, **ScotchColor 200 Film** or **Polaroid OneFilm Color Print Film** (ISO 200) in the medium speed range (ISO 160-200). There also seems to be considerable variability in the fading quality of the paper upon which photos were printed. **Fujicolor Super FA Type 3** and **Fujicolor SFA3** papers could be exposed for up to 50 years without colour fade. Kodak's most popular papers tend to fade after about 10 years.

Treat colour photographs as a temporary medium and assume that you will have to have them copied at some point.

Preserving VCR tapes

Over the last decade, the use of VCR tape has become more widespread. However, VCR tape is **even more fragile than colour photographs** and thus, if you use it, you must take great care to use it with caution.

VCR tape is very complex in structure involving a combination of metal oxides, lubricants, and plasticizers being "bound" to a "base" of clear polyester tape. This mix of chemicals serves a variety of purposes, but each of the component parts of the finished tape is subject to unique problems - and failure of any one of them can make the tape unplayable. Because of this complex mix even the best quality tape can begin to degrade quite quickly, **often within a year or two after its manufacturing**. Even under ideal conditions, the binder that holds together this mix of chemicals is very delicate and it is usually quite easy to scrape off parts of the chemicals from the base. For whatever reason, as degradation occurs the image that is played back on a television screen becomes poorer and poorer, until it can no longer be viewed.

VCR tape is subject to harm from a variety of sources. Just as with paper and photographs, **heat** can speed the chemical reactions that cause the tape to fail, and **humidity** can encourage the growth of various biological agents that can destroy the tape.

"Binder breakdown" is a frequent cause of tape failure. As it breaks down, pieces of information are gradually lost creating various problems when the tape is played.

Because VCR tape can only be viewed by playing it through a VCR, which is itself a complicated mechanical device, it is also frequently damaged by mechanical problems within the machine. Dirt is the most frequent problem. Dirt, even microscopic particles, if located in strategic spots on the transport mechanism or VCR head can cause continual scratching on the tapes. Each scratch scrapes off a bit more material from the polyester tape base and each loss of material further degrades the image.

There is no long-term strategy for preserving VCR tape. It is reasonable to expect that **most VCR tapes**, for one reason or another, **will be unplayable after approximately a decade**. Within this short life-span, however, it is possible to take steps that will keep the tape and the images preserved on the tape, in better condition, thus allowing for a higher quality copy of the tape to eventually be made.

VCR tape preservation tips

- ◆ Buy named brand, good quality VCR tape. Buying the cheapest tape available is asking for preservation trouble.
- ◆ Make a "preservation" copy of the VCR tape as soon as it is shot. Check the preservation copy once a year, but otherwise never play it. This "pristine" copy will serve you well when the time comes to copy the tape onto a new tape. Use a second, "user" copy of the tape to view the tape on a more regular basis, for research etc. Although with each viewing the

user copy will slowly degrade, the images will be preserved in the best possible state on the "preservation" copy.

- ◆ VCR tape should be viewed and rewind annually. Annual viewing makes it possible to detect problems before they lead to the catastrophic failure of the tape. Annual rewinding helps avoid a number of problems that can occur as the tightly wound VCR tape rests up against itself.
- ◆ Always use a clean, well-functioning VCR machine to play the tape. Microscopic particles of dirt can cause irreparable damage to the tape as it races past the VCR head. It is particularly important to make sure the VCR has been cleaned and checked before playing the preservation copy of your tapes.
- ◆ Assume VCR tape will have to be copied. The medium of tape is very fragile and subject to a variety of fatal harms. Plan on copying tape at least once every ten years.

Summary of key points for preserving your materials

1. The best protection for your books, papers, photographs, prints and tapes is a "safe" environment: moderate **temperature** and relative **humidity**, **clean air** and **good air circulation**, **no natural** or **fluorescent light**, and **careful handling**. Even though creating some of these environmental conditions may seem difficult, ensure that you **adhere to the principle** at least and maximise them as far as you able.
2. **Avoid powerful sources of heat, damp, and pollution**; don't store your valuable books, photos, and papers in the roof of your house or at ground level. Think about the situation around where you are storing the materials as well - is there a rain gulley nearby that could overflow, for example?
3. **Heat** causes damage. Don't hang valuable objects over cookers or fireplaces. Nor should important documents be kept near such places or close to a window
4. **Light** causes fading and other damage. Keep photos and art (prints, watercolours, and other works on paper) in the dark as much as possible. Don't put valuable books and paper where they'll get direct sun or bright light of any kind. Hallways or other rooms without windows are best.
5. **Indoor pollution** is a growing problem, and causes rapid damage to paper. The glass or plastic glazing of a frame will keep pollution and dirt away, and the item's edges will not be damaged by handling or tacks.
6. **Black and white photos last longer than colour**. Video, colour slides and most colour prints have a limited life expectancy and you need to be aware of this in your use and storage of them.
7. If you want to keep a clipping from the newspaper for the long term, have it **photocopied** on to high quality paper (e.g. Xerox XXV Century Bond or Howard Permalife). The copy will last far longer than the original.
8. Letters, clippings, and other documents you want to preserve should be **stored flat and opened out** in high quality (low acid) folders. Folding and unfolding breaks paper and can cause damage as items are removed and replaced. If you can't find buffered folders, use a sheet of buffered paper (e.g. Xerox XXV Century Bond or Howard Permalife) at the front and back of folder.

9. When storing photos in an album, **use "photo" mounting corners**, not glues or self-sealing plastic, which can stick to or react with your pictures.
10. To **remove the musty smell from old books**, make sure they are dry. Put them in a cool, dry space for a couple of days or put them outside on a table in the sun or a dry, breezy day for a couple of hours. If the musty smell remains, put them in an open container (e.g. box) inside a large, closed container (e.g. clean, dry box) with an open box of baking soda or a pot-pourri. Do not allow the deodorizer to touch the books. Leave for a few days in a cool place, checking once a day to make sure no mold is growing.
11. To **remove staples or paperclips from documents** (especially if the fastener is rusty), slide a very thin piece of stiff plastic (e.g. polyester, polypropylene) under the fastener on both sides of the document. Slide the paperclip off the plastic or use a pair of tweezers or a thin knife to bend the ends of the staple up and pry it out. The plastic will protect the paper from abrasion and your tools.

USING ELECTRONIC MEDIA TO PRESERVE & STORE YOUR MATERIALS

One of the best ways to ensure that your materials are kept for prosperity is to make a copy of them. We have already discussed how photographs, audio tapes and video tapes should be copied. If you do not have negatives of a photograph, it is a good idea to have the picture re-photographed - although make sure that someone quite skilled at this task will do the job so that the best copy possible is made. Of course, photocopying written documents is also to be advised - although try to ensure that the best quality paper possible is used to ensure that the copy itself remains useable for the longest possible period.

However, the obvious difficulty with all this is that, if you have problems storing your original materials, you are not likely to solve any of these problems by simply duplicating the amount of material that you have. Having twice as many tapes and twice as many pieces of paper is not a very appealing prospect. It is a good idea, therefore, to consider the use of electronic media for your storage and preservation needs. Even in Rangoon, it is possible to put videos on CD-Rom. Generally, this process is difficult and expensive - but scanning and storing photographs, text and audio tape on a CD is not.

Obviously the expense of digitising materials is a concern, as is the availability of equipment and skilled people to do the job. However, you might be surprised at how accessible some of this equipment is and that it can actually be done at relatively low cost. Not having the equipment or the expertise yourself does not necessarily debar you from making selective use of electronic media for the preservation and storage of important materials. Commercial computer companies operate in a highly competitive market and the techniques required are not that difficult when you are familiar with the software. It is worth considering making use of commercial companies, for example in Chiang Mai or in Bangkok, who may be able to do this for you without major expense. Certainly if your materials are of significance and value to your community, it is worthwhile pooling resources to have a selection of key materials preserved in this way. Furthermore, having computer discs of this material creates a whole range of new options as to how the material may be used and developed - including publishing and web sites.

Using scanners and scanning²⁷

It is now relatively easy and cheap to scan pictures and documents onto a computer, which can make storage of the material much easier, and this is also a useful component in preparing material for publication. Scanners of reasonable quality can now be purchased relatively inexpensively, and they are also now quite common in Rangoon and other urban centres in Burma. However, you may also take the materials to commercial centres. The following information is simply intended to explain some of the basics of scanning so that the process, or its prospect, will seem less mysterious and threatening, particularly if you are unacquainted with computers and/or publishing.

²⁷ Adapted from information on the web site <http://www.genealogy.com/61-chronicle.html>, by Halvor Moorshead

File size

When you scan a picture onto a computer you have to bear in mind that each image will take up relatively a large amount of space. If your computer does not have a lot of memory, for example, you may find that it takes a long time to perform actions using scanned images. A fairly ordinary picture can take up the equivalent space on your hard drive as a novel - about 180,000 words (1.5 megabytes of disc space).

Many scanners are promoted because they are high resolution (about 600dpi - 'dots per inch'). This should mean that they give very accurate copies of the image that is scanned. In reality, you will not need to scan at such a high resolution in most cases (except when you are scanning a small section of a picture which you want to enlarge and do not want to lose any detail). If you DO scan at 600dpi, an average 6"x4" photo produces a 25 megabyte image! Therefore, try to **scan at as low a resolution as possible** unless you have a specific reason not to.

Another practical way in which you can prevent your scanned images clogging up your disc space is to save them at less than their original size. Learn to vary your scanning depending on the nature of the picture: if the subject is extremely important, by all means give it the space it needs, otherwise save the image as a smaller size.

Compressing images

You can help yourself to save file space by saving your images as JPEG images (pronounced Jay-peg). When you open up a JPEG file it automatically decompresses and displays itself as normal.

However, you can't scan an image as a JPEG - you will probably have to scan it as a TIFF file. But before you save it, go to Save As, scroll down to JPEG and then Save. At this stage you may be offered a degree of compression, usually on a scale of 1-10 (1 is most compressed, 10 the least). Experiment to see which you prefer. The low end of the scale (1-2) can result in a loss of some quality. Halvor Moorshead of Genealogy.com recommends that you use 8.

JPEG compression should not be used on any file that is to be opened, modified and resaved (for example, if you are trying to restore a damaged picture on the computer). If you do this, any quality loss that may occur will simply be made worse each time you save it.

Scanning text

You can also scan other documents - reports, letters etc. onto disc, and most scanners have OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software to do this. In fact, the software that will come with an average home-scanner is not very high quality and there may be problems when scanning some features. For example, some scanners have difficulties with multiple columns of text on a page, or documents that include photographs, logos etc. The solution to this problem is to photocopy the original and then cut the columns of the photocopy into strips and remove the photographs. Some people claim that if you enlarge the photocopied image it will scan better. In most cases, this is not so.

Text when saved as an image is best saved as Line Art, for which you do not have to use your OCR facility at all.

Changing the image after you have scanned it

While you are scanning, you will have some options to adjust the colour, contrast etc. - avoid using this. After you have scanned your image you will automatically be given the same options - and probably in more detail. So first SCAN your image, then SAVE it, then ADJUST it if necessary.

There are two exceptions to this rule:

1. When saving text as a Line Art image at 600 dpi. These images will be saved as 'bitmaps' (.bmp files) which cannot be adjusted or manipulated very easily anyway
2. When using descreening

Descreening

Images in newspapers and magazines are reproduced quite differently from photographic prints. They are reduced to a series of small dots. When scanning these you can easily get an interference pattern between the dots on the original and the dots scanned. Some scanners allow you to 'descreen' when scanning: blurring the dot pattern so it appears more like a photograph. The process is very effective and is far, far better than trying to overcome the screening or patterning with photo enhancement software.

Adjusting contrast, brightness and sharpness

Although high quality image restoration on a computer is a very skilled job, if you scan a photograph, for example, that is faded or a little damaged, you might like to try making some small adjustments which can significantly improve the quality of the image. Simply by using the brightness, contrast and sharpness settings you can markedly improve the clarity of the picture. Most photo enhancement programmes include an AUTOMATIC facility which you could try if you are not sure yourself what to do. If you do not like the results, simply UNDO what you have done and try again.

Black and white

It is very common that people try to save black and white images as colour ones - possibly because they feel that the fading that has occurred, making the picture sepia-toned, renders it now a colour image. In fact, such fading is a distortion of the image. If you save files as colour they will take up **three times** as much **file space** and you will simply preserve, rather than correct, the distortion of fading. There is no advantage at all in saving monochrome images as colour.

Storing images after they have been scanned

The golden rule has to be **don't keep images on your hard drive**. It is possible to store quite a number of black and white images, compressed as JPEG files, even on a standard 3-1/2 inch floppy disc. If you have the opportunity to do so, it may be advisable to store the images on a CD. Although getting a CD-R drive (Recordable CD drive) is quite expensive, many computer companies have these already and the recordable CD discs themselves are relatively cheap. You can typically store 650 megabytes of data on one CD - sufficient to contain a quite extensive colour image collection in full. Once you have recorded onto these discs, you cannot re-record over the data so it is impossible to erase the data by accident.

Making prints

If you have an ordinary home printer you may be a little disappointed at the quality of your print outs once you have scanned the images. This is not because of the image but because of the printer. Depending on why you are printing out, it is usually advisable to take your disc to a printer who will print out for you - the better quality the printer, the better quality the print. Use positive film if you want to publish the images.

It is now possible to get special paper for printing out images from scanned photographs. This can have wonderful results. Generally, however, consider carefully the purpose to which an image will be put and then make the appropriate choices.

Some basics about converting audio and video to CD

Audio tapes

It is surprisingly easy to put audio tapes on CD - much easier than with graphics or video. The important thing is to try and make your original recording as good as possible - but it is not necessary to use digital recording equipment. Regular analog equipment is fine. It is very easy to digitize and edit the material and some problems can be sorted out in the editing process - however, it cannot create what is not there. If your recording is muffled and lacks clarity, it will only be possible to improve it marginally. It is almost as easy to cut and paste sound files as it is text. Down sample to 8 bit/22.050kHz, mono and save as QuickTime - avoid compressing the file in contrast to what has been recommended with graphics.²⁸

Video tapes

Putting video onto CD is the most difficult and expensive procedure. It can be done in Rangoon, however, and it is much cheaper to do it there than outside the country. If you have the support of a sponsor, it may be possible to convert a whole tape to CD format, but at present this process always necessitates quite a considerable degree of editing so that only key points of the video are stored in this way. The digitizing

²⁸ *Making a Family History CD: Recommended Procedures with Audio*,
<http://members.aol.com/TomboMedia/Audio.html>

process is technically a little tricky and the digitizing boards that are necessary are very expensive necessitating that this must be done by a professional, commercial enterprise. You will also probably need to re-copy and edit your material using a commercial video-editing company - but this can usually be done at quite reasonable cost. In the future, the DVD format will probably be developed further so that the whole process becomes easier - but for the time being this is not something that will greatly improve the speed, cost or availability of this form of media conversion. However, if you can convert just two or three minutes of material, this can be a useful and attractive addition to a web site, for example.

WORKING WITH YOUR MATERIALS

If your purpose in doing this work is not purely archival, you will need to think about how you can work with your materials.²⁹ The kinds of products that you can produce from a project include:

- ◆ Local language publications
- ◆ National language publications
- ◆ International language publications
- ◆ Contributions to radio programmes
- ◆ Educational and literacy materials
- ◆ Web sites etc.

However, when considering how to work with and develop the materials you will need to bear in mind some important considerations: **the audience** you want to reach; **the aim** that you have in trying to communicate this material; **the medium** you will use to communicate the material; **the emphasis** that you will place on the material.

1. The audience

There are usually two potential audiences - 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

- ◆ 'Insiders' - these are, for example, the community and interviewers which generated the testimonies in the first place, and in whose interests it has been collected.
- ◆ 'Outsiders' - the wider audience whom you wish to inform and influence. This second, wider audience could simply be the general public, but it could also include a more specialist one of development practitioners and/or researchers.

²⁹ Information in this section has been taken from *Giving Voice*, Panos OTP, London, 1999.

2. The aim

What do you want your audience to learn or gain from the material? Unless you are reproducing word-for word, uncut interviews, this will influence any selection and editing decisions you make. Be honest about your aims and intentions. Otherwise your audience, and even you yourself, may not realise the extent to which any selection you make is presenting only a particular aspect of the material - that which reflects your own interests, for example - rather than the whole range of concerns contained within it. Whether your primary purpose is education, documentation or entertainment may also influence the way you present the material and perhaps the medium you choose to do so.

3. The Medium

You may choose to present your material in print, on a tape, on a CD or on the internet. You may want to make a radio programme or to produce tapes for community level distribution or low-cost, photocopied booklets

Some groups from Burma are already in the process of developing their own web sites and there are companies on the internet who can make the whole process incredibly easy by taking you through a step-by-step guide to make your own web site design. As stated at the beginning of this manual, the use of computer and/or web site technology, and other technological skills such as editing, preparing materials for publication etc., can provide a good way of getting young people interested in your work. Although internet access for communities in and from Burma is obviously minimal in the extreme, for those groups who do have access, such a forum can be a very effective way of presenting information about your community to a wider audience. Following is an example of a very simple, but very effective web site about the plight of Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge regime [<http://www.edweb.gsn.org/sideshow>]. Contained on the web site are a number of personal written testimonies, but others contain the transcripts of oral testimonies. All such web sites contain various 'links' that can be made with related sites. You click on the link that you want and you can get more information. Many people, especially of the older generation, who ironically are the ones who are typically most interested in developing oral history and oral tradition projects, feel intimidated by the internet. There are many apprehensions about what it is and how difficult it is to use. Appendix 1, which details a Media Briefing from the Panos Institute, has been included in this manual in an attempt to give an overview of some of the main points and issues concerning the internet in relation to countries such as Burma: what it is, how it developed, and the problems created by inequalities in accessing it.

4. The emphasis

Many publications etc. of oral material tend to emphasise the voices of the narrators. In a book this would mean the bulk of the text was the words of the narrators themselves. This is particularly the case with Oral Testimony projects. A more academic approach would result in the greater proportion of the text being the writer/researcher's analysis and interpretation of the material, with quotes from the testimonies introduced to illustrate the argument. But these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. A CD-Rom, for example, could be designed to allow the audience to move between different kinds of information.

If you want to emphasise the voices of people, there are a number of ways that this can be done in a booklet, for example:

By narrator -

- ◆ All the testimonies, narrator by narrator, with questions, uncut
- ◆ All the testimonies, narrator by narrator, minus questions, but otherwise uncut
- ◆ All the testimonies, narrator by narrator, with repetition etc. cut from the text
- ◆ Selections from the testimonies. This involves more substantial editing, whereby you select what seems to you and other participants to be the most interesting, eloquent, powerful or representative sections (again, with or without questions). These extracts may vary from short quotes to much longer sections.

By theme -

- ◆ Selections from the testimonies presented thematically, rather than narrator by narrator. Thus you would have extracts from different narrators under subject headings, for example: a series of extended quotes from different interviewees on migration, or marriage patterns, for example.

There are advantages to both kinds of presentation. Even if you go for the narrator by narrator approach, you can use sub-headings to indicate themes as they come up in the text. And if your main audience is the community - the narrators, the interviewees, their friends and families - then they might well prefer to have their interviews presented in this way, rather than split up under different headings. If they see this first publication more as a documentary record of their community and their views at that time - something to pass on to their children and grandchildren - then full testimonies may be their preference.

If you decide to present the testimonies by theme, you are going to have to put in more time, deciding on the themes and choosing the selected texts, but you may end up with a more coherent and accessible publication, which will appeal to those both within and outside the community.

Obviously the least time-consuming approach is to present unedited material, narrator by narrator, but this could end up being quite a bulky publication, and while the individual narrators may like this, it might prove rather overwhelming to other readers. Also, some readers may appreciate having some of their testimony cut, for example where perhaps they felt less certain about the subject being talked about, and/or there were lots of one line questions and answers, or where they had rambled and lost the thread of the conversation. They may prefer only to have those parts published where they felt more confident about their views or had especially interesting experiences or opinions to relate. The best thing is to discuss these ideas with all concerned, and see which they would prefer.

If you are presenting a work on **oral tradition**, especially if that tradition is very lengthy, there are similar considerations to take into account. Do you want to present the tradition in full, or extracts from it? Do you need to include commentary and/or translation? Will the translation face the transcript or come before or after it? There is no one way of presenting such work - but all possibilities need to be considered carefully.



Appendix

Supplementary Notes: *Questions & Activities* boxes

APPENDIX: Supplementary Notes - 'QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES' boxes

Given that some of the issues raised by the 'Questions and Activities' boxes can be extremely sensitive and emotive for some people, it is very important that the trainer/project coordinator follows a few general guidelines:

- ◆ The purpose of the debate is to encourage **positive** discussion that ultimately feeds into the development of **realistic** and **sensitive** projects - try to keep this end goal in mind and avoid discussions that wander too far from the point, however interesting they may be. For example, you might find that people will suddenly remember something from their family history and others may then be moved to join in with their own lengthy accounts. This is great in so far as the participants are clearly motivated by what they are discussing - but always try to reflect these experiences back onto what they may mean for the project itself that you are developing
- ◆ The **anger** that some may feel towards the history(ies) of their communities and/or that of themselves and their families needs to be respected but should try to be dealt with **constructively** in relation to how such histories can be recorded and the value that they may have, rather than as providing a focus for expressions of anger and/or hatred
- ◆ Statements that might be considered **racist, sexist or prejudiced towards a particular group**, be they a religious or other ethnic community, should be **discouraged**. These kinds of statements will commonly arise in the course of such emotive discussions but will not assist in the kind of work that has been outlined in this manual, however heartfelt or justified the person making the statement may feel their comments are. When such comments are made, it is useful to reflect constructively on the reasons why the statement has been made, which may sometimes have a historical perspective, and to show how the community narrative that lies behind the statement can be addressed through the careful and thoughtful work of the proposed project itself
- ◆ It is sometimes a good idea to allow people to discuss these questions in **pairs or small groups** first before presenting them for general discussion. This will help to prevent individuals feeling insecure that their answer may be 'wrong' or 'stupid' or else will prevent group criticism being focused upon one person. If discussion is conducted in pairs or small groups first, try to ensure that different people from

each group give feedback - avoid any one person taking on the role of 'spokesperson' for the duration of the training session

- ◆ At the beginning of the session people may be **unsure of themselves** and may only want to say what they feel is the 'correct' answer. Make sure that you encourage statements that fall outside these usually predictable boundaries to show that you are not judgmental of differing opinions
- ◆ At the end of any discussion, try to draw up a list of **the main points** that the group has made and to clarify the relevance of the discussion for the project in question and how the issues raised will be incorporated into the development of the project in identifiable ways

Q&A - Oral History Subjects (p.9)

The main point of this section is to encourage people to review the recent past in relation to the experience of 'ordinary' members of the community, and also the experiences of different generations. The trainer should encourage participants to consider different elements of the 'community' - by age, sex, status etc. Try to encourage the idea that there is not one 'history' but many different ways in which groups within a community may focus on what has happened to them and how these histories overlap and interconnect, as well as make themselves distinct. The purpose of this is to try to sensitise participants to the idea that no one group (e.g.: men of a particular generation or status) can relate a community's history as if their experiences stand for those of the community as a whole. Participants should be encouraged to recognise that 'history' is actually an interplay of different narratives.

Q&A - Oral Traditions (p.10)

It might be the case that the participants in your group have not thought seriously about oral traditions in their community(ies). These forms may either be considered 'old fashioned' or 'not relevant' or else they may be so familiar that people take them for granted. The questions in this box should focus people's attention on the role(s) that oral traditions play or played in their community, their own experience of hearing them (or performing them) and to think about this experience in a broader cultural and social context. They should consider various issues concerning age and sex of the tellers of the traditions, and what the consequence of the social status of the traditions and their tellers may be for the development of an effective project. It may also be useful to consider the traditions in their communities in relation to what they know of those of other communities to encourage discussion of style, technique and message.

Q&A - Oral History and Development (p.13)

This is potentially a very difficult section but the intention of including it is to focus attention on how oral history/tradition can assist the process of successful project development. Try not to personalise the discussion of failure so that it becomes an acrimonious discussion on 'who' is/was to blame for 'what' but focus instead on the positive contribution that an oral history /testimony/tradition project could make. It might even be preferable to consider hypothetical new development schemes (some of which might be based on issues that are currently

important in the community or the locality) to consider ways in which oral history might effectively be incorporated into project design - and for what purpose and with what intended results. It would also be useful to consider in some depth the reasons why people do not listen and to try to make the participants think about their own prejudices in this respect based on status and educational level etc.

Q&A - Ethnic Histories (p.20)

It is very important in this section to encourage participants to consider both the distinctive aspects of their community(ies) histories but also how these narratives relate to those of other groups with whom they are/have been in contact. They should consider these narratives in relation to both a small and a large scale rather than seek to isolate their group from the narratives of 'others' - and indeed whether and why these communities might be considered as 'others'. They should also try to review and assess the various texts that may have been written about their community(ies) and their strengths and weaknesses. If they criticise a particular written source, participants should be encouraged to support this critique in substantial ways - and then to discuss how the versions of the history known to them differ from these written accounts. If there are differences, how could these variations be recorded or researched and integrated into a deeper debate? If the texts are criticised on the basis of what is known in the community but has never been written down it is important that it is discussed how such popular accounts could be made known more widely. Who holds this knowledge? How might it be transmitted? The various roles of written and oral sources relating specifically to their group history(ies) should also be emphasised.

Q&A - Historical Sources (p.34)

Many of the 'answers' in this section are to be found either explicitly or implicitly in the text and participants should be encouraged to look for the answers there. Questions such as 'What is bias?' are very complicated theoretical issues that historians have debated for many generations. The most important points raised in this section, therefore, really relates as much to raising awareness in the participants of the ways in which their own background, status, education, religion, ethnic affiliation, sex, age etc. can influence their own interpretations of documents - or how they might influence how they write history - as much as it relates to these issues in others. Thus, focussing on documents or accounts/books written by others provides a means by which the participants themselves are brought face to face with these issues in their own lives and work. It is also important to show how even an apparently 'useless' account can be 'useful' in some ways if careful critical method is applied.

Q&A - You and Your Language (p.36)

The purpose of this question box is laid out in the text. However, it is very important that the linguistic issues relating to your project are thought through. It may be that many of the participants in your project are themselves of a dominant linguistic group and they should be encouraged to think about other perspectives on this issue within their community(ies). The status of written and oral communication in the community should also be considered, and how transcriptions and translations will be made and what the implications of those decisions might be. Will they include or exclude various people from having access to the project's output.

'Learning to Listen' is a manual designed specifically for those who want to develop oral history and oral testimony projects with people in or from Burma. The manual has been developed with the support of Panos Oral Testimony Programme, who permitted incorporation of training materials that have been developed by them worldwide for use in NGOs and community groups. The manual gives a basic introduction to the planning, implementation and assessment of oral projects, as well as guidelines on dissemination and preservation of oral and visual materials in settings where only basic technologies are available. The principles, however, are adaptable to a range of different contexts and examples are included in the text of a wide range of projects for those who want more detailed discussion of some of the issues raised. 'Learning to Listen' will be a valuable tool for all those interested in pursuing oral research with communities from Burma, and the Burmese translation of the text will be of benefit both to local researchers and to those who want to develop their work collaboratively.

